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modern sensibilities?

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“ The transatlantic slave trade is one of the bleakest episodes in history and there’s no denying that Britain played a major role in it. But following the British abolition of the trade in 1807, a dramatic volte-face ensued and the Royal Navy was unleashed against those nations who continued to ship enslaved Africans across the ocean. In our cover feature this month, Mary Wills tells the story of the **West Africa Squadron’s battle against slave traders**, exploring how it encompassed “politics, principle, philanthropy and national identity – and a flawed mission affecting human lives”. You’ll find it on page 48.

It was less than two years ago that Queen Elizabeth II died and Charles III became king, ending the longest reign in Britain’s history. It was a significant shift but surely less momentous than that of 1603, when the first Elizabeth was followed by King James VI of Scotland, and **the Tudors were replaced by the Stuarts**. But what did the people make of the new man at the top? Well, that is a question Susan Doran answers in her feature this month, which begins on page 58.

Finally, it’s a **boom time for historical drama**, with major new series arriving almost weekly. They undoubtedly fuel an interest in the past but also raise questions about how that past should be presented in the 21st century. In this month’s *Conversation* (page 11), we’ve asked four experts for their thoughts about whether modern sensibilities should shape the creation of these dramas. You’ll no doubt have views of your own so please let us know what you think.

Rob Attar
Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Back down to Earth

I was interested to discover that, in the afterglow of being the second person on the moon, Buzz Aldrin remembered to submit his expense claim for the trip – a mere \$33.31 (page 39).

2. A mammoth achievement

In her winning article on the history of games, Kelly Clancy highlights that the Egyptian ancestor of backgammon, senet, was created when woolly mammoths still roamed the Earth (page 28).

3. Big in Japan

Tokyo feels like such a modern city that you might well be surprised to learn that, back in the mid-18th century, it was likely the largest metropolis in the world (page 86).



THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Kelly Clancy

“We can learn a lot about people by studying what fascinates them, and games have enthralled people for millennia. In my feature, I explore what five such games tell us about the people who played them.”

Kelly reveals how games have helped humans make sense of the world on page 27



Max Hastings

“I’ve been writing about small episodes that seem to illustrate important realities about bigger things – and which are also jolly good stories in their own right.”

Max chronicles one of the greatest airborne raids of the Second World War on page 68



Ruby Lal

“I was the first scholar to work with Princess Gulbadan’s memoir, the only book in prose by a Mughal woman. It’s a treasure – an astute account of the daily lives of women and children in Mughal society.”

Ruby hails the achievements of a remarkable Mughal princess on page 42



Daisy Dunn

“While the women of Greek myth have enjoyed a comeback in recent years, the real women of antiquity continue to be overlooked. I put them at the forefront of my new history of the classical world.”

Daisy explores women’s immense contributions to the Greco-Persian Wars on page 20

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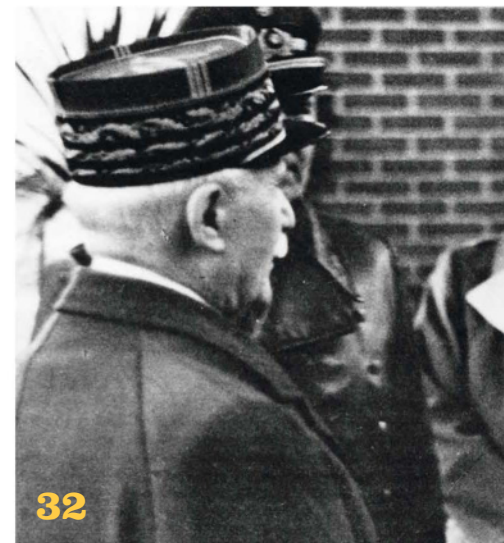
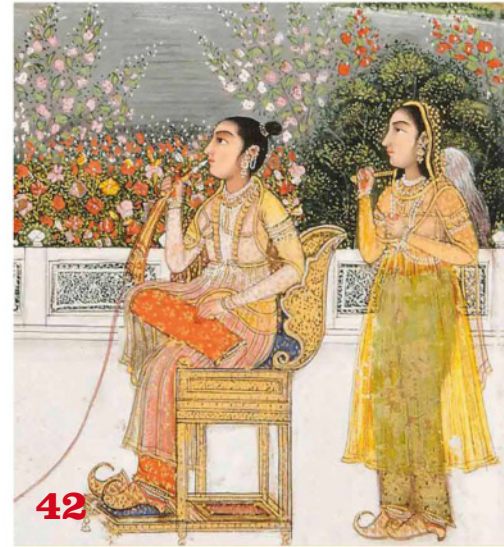
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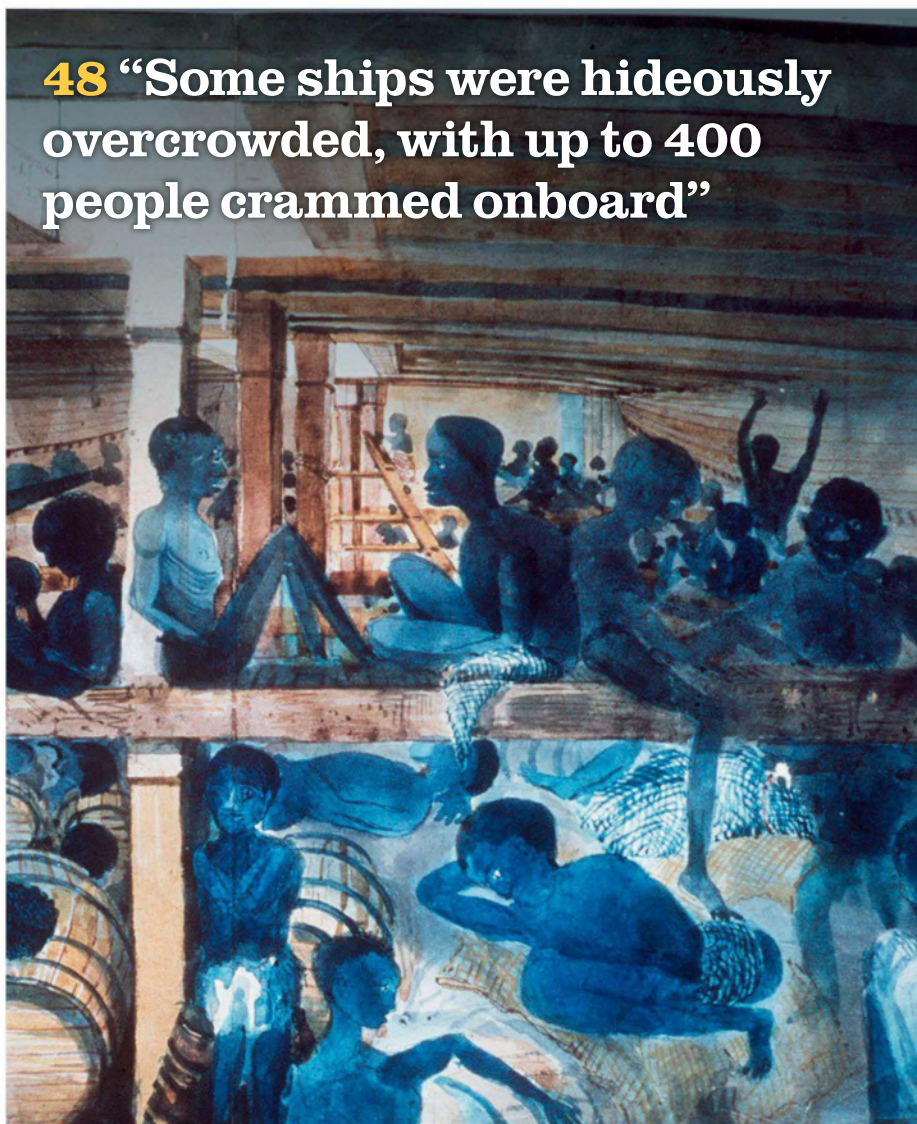
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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in July in history

21 JULY AD 365

Alexandria is hit by a tsunami

A megaquake in the Mediterranean wreaks havoc

During the early hours of a summer morning in AD 365, the city of Alexandria, along Egypt's Mediterranean coast, was devastated by an enormous tidal wave.

"Slightly after daybreak, and heralded by a thick succession of fiercely shaken thunderbolts, the solidity of the whole Earth was made to shake and shudder, and the sea was driven away, its waves were rolled back, and it disappeared," wrote the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus.

Beneath the eastern Mediterranean, just off the island of Crete, the Earth's crust had slipped, displacing an immense quantity of seawater towards northern Egypt. Although people at the time had no means of measuring earthquakes, modern-day geologists estimate that it likely registered somewhere between 8.0–8.5 on the Richter Scale – a truly devastating event.

Indeed, there is evidence that Crete itself was lifted off the seabed by at least 9 metres, indicating that this was an event without any known equal in this part of Europe.

The undersea earthquake caused the water to recede – exposing "many-shaped varieties of sea-creatures... seen stuck in the slime", according to Marcellinus's account – but the sea soon returned with apocalyptic intensity.

A tidal surge collided with the famed city of Alexandria, hurling ships over its formidable sea defences and engulfing its busy streets. Thousands of Alexandrians were swept to their deaths and the city's iconic buildings were flooded. The wave rushed further inland, sweeping away entire villages and inundating farmland, which was ruined by the salty water.

So traumatic was the scale of the cataclysm that generations of Egyptians afterwards would recall 21 July as a 'day of horror'.

A modern illustration of giant waves. Alexandria was devastated by a tsunami in the fourth century



BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY



This pictograph found in New Mexico, US, is thought to depict an ancient supernova



4 JULY 1054

Chinese, Islamic and possibly Mesoamerican astronomers observe a strange celestial event. Visible during the day for nearly a month afterwards, it is a supernova (an exploding star), whose remnants will later be called the 'Crab Nebula' or 'SN 1054'.

11 JULY 1690

The battle of the Boyne rages

Jacobites and Williamites fight for control of Ireland

Along the verdant banks of the river Boyne, near the Irish town of Drogheda, forces loyal to the deposed monarch, James II & VII, fought those of his usurper, William of Orange.

This clash had been years in the making. As king of England, Ireland and Scotland, James's increasingly unabashed Catholic faith jarred with his kingdom's deep-rooted suspicion of 'popery'. Six noblemen and a bishop had invited William of Orange to seize the crown, and on 15 November 1688 he had landed in Devon with 35,000 troops. The 'Glorious Revolution' resulted in William and his consort, Mary, being enthroned as joint monarchs.

James absconded to France to the court of his cousin, Louis XIV, where he plotted retribution. Ireland's staunch Catholicism and loyalty to James presented itself as a launchpad. The Earl of Tyrconnell, the island's lord deputy, mustered a fighting force of 23,000 from the country's Jacobites (after the Latin form of 'James') and Louis' auxiliaries, while the exiled king landed in Ireland a year before the epic showdown at the Boyne.

Though persuaded to leave Dublin, James dismissed advice to set up camp to the city's south in favour of a ford to the north, near Drogheda. William landed in Carrickfergus in June 1690, rallying a huge army of about 37,000 soldiers, including Irish Protestants and Dutch, German and Scottish fighters.

On the eve of the clash, William was injured by a Jacobite cannonball while out surveying the field, but stayed on to fight the next day. Ultimately, the Williamites – who were more battle-hardened and had advanced weaponry – prevailed.

The Jacobites retreated to Dublin, while James fled to France, leaving dreams of an independent Ireland in tatters. William would eventually secure further victories across Ireland, consolidating his rule, while the Jacobite cause would continue to flare up in the century that followed.



The death of Frederick, 1st Duke of Schomberg, at the battle of the Boyne, as shown in a copy of an early 19th-century painting by Benjamin West

Samantha Smith appeared
at a press conference in
her Moscow hotel in 1983



7 JULY 1983

After exchanging letters with Soviet leader Yuri Andropov expressing concerns about a potential nuclear war between the United States and the USSR, 11-year-old American schoolgirl Samantha Smith visits Moscow at the personal invitation of her unexpected pen pal.



29 JULY 1981

Charles and Diana tie the knot

*The 'wedding of the century'
breaks broadcasting records*

An estimated global television audience of 750 million watched as Lady Diana Spencer emerged from the Glass Coach in front of St Paul's Cathedral in central London. Resplendent in an ivory silk taffeta gown, the young bride dazzled cheering well-wishers as she ascended the steps on the arm of her father, Earl Spencer.

Five months earlier, Charles, the Prince of Wales, and Diana had announced their engagement to the world. Charles had proposed after receiving a letter from his father urging him to settle down and either marry Diana or move on.

As photographers had jostled to get a close-up of Diana's engagement ring, Charles had raised eyebrows when he replied to a journalist's query about their feelings with the comment "whatever 'in love' means".

Aged just 20 when she processed down the aisle, Diana was the first English woman to marry an heir to the throne in more than 300 years. Her dress, shrouded in secrecy for months, had been designed by husband-and-wife duo David and Elizabeth Emanuel. It glistened with 10,000 mother-of-pearl sequins and pearls, and sported a record-breaking 25-foot-long train.

Both the bride and groom slightly muddled their vows. Diana's nerves showed briefly when she mixed up her betrothed's multiple names, calling him "Philip Charles Arthur George". Charles, meanwhile, said "thy goods" instead of "my worldly goods".

Conducting the nuptials, the archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, observed: "Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made – the prince and princess on their wedding day."

With Westminster Abbey the usual venue for royal weddings, St Paul's Cathedral was an unusual choice. The last royal wedding there had been in 1501 between Arthur, Prince of Wales and Catherine of Aragon.

Alongside Britain's royal family, 3,500 guests made up the congregation for Charles and Diana's wedding, including prime minister Margaret Thatcher, Commonwealth governors-general, and most of Europe's

15 JULY 1849

The city of Venice endures the first aerial bombing raid in history when Austria deploys dozens of pilotless balloons armed with bombs and shrapnel. During the 1848 revolutions, Venice had asserted its independence from Vienna's rule, leading to an Austrian siege.



The San Geremia Church is ablaze during the Austrian assault on Venice in 1849



Charles and Diana take an open carriage from St Paul's Cathedral to Buckingham Palace on their wedding day, 29 July 1981

crowned and elected heads of state. King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia of Spain boycotted the wedding after Madrid took umbrage with the newlyweds' plans to stop over on Gibraltar during their honeymoon.

The wedding was a fusion of the old and the new. Respecting a royal custom established in 1923, the couple's rings were forged of Welsh gold from the Clogau St David's mine in Bontddu. But, breaking with tradition, Charles and Diana were the first British royal couple to drop the bridal pledge to 'obey' the husband.

Despite the seeming felicity and national jubilation of that historic day, Charles and Diana's marriage was plagued with difficulties from the outset. Both would engage in extramarital affairs, and, after years of public acrimony and scandal, the couple would divorce in 1996.

ALAMY



A group of labour workers are marched along during their forced deportation in July 1917

12 JULY 1917

Miners are kidnapped in Arizona

An armed mob forcibly deports striking workers

On 12 July 1917, one of the most notorious incidents in American labour history unfolded: the Bisbee Deportation. Against the tumultuous backdrop of the First World War and the revolutionary events taking place in Russia, this episode took the form of collusion between corporate interests and local law enforcement.

The conflict involved 1,186 miners who were mostly members of a trade union called the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). They had organised a strike and were demanding better working conditions in the area's copper mines, which were dominated by the Phelps Dodge Corporation.

Fearful of both the strike's potential spread and the perceived threat of radicalism, Phelps Dodge executives, alongside sheriff Harry Wheeler, orchestrated a sinister response.

Wheeler dragooned a legion of armed locals, unleashing them on the unsuspecting miners with ruthless efficiency. In a meticulously planned operation, both strikers and innocent

bystanders were herded onto cattle cars bound for Tres Hermanas, New Mexico, 200 miles east.

A mix of nationalities including Americans, Mexicans, Serbians and other Europeans, the deportees were subjected to a harrowing journey with no food and little water. Meanwhile, Bisbee was plunged into a communications blackout, effectively censoring news of the illegal kidnapping.

Amid the chaos, opportunism ran rampant. Many of the sheriff's vigilantes exploited the situation to settle personal vendettas, leaving a trail of violence and looting in their wake.

Stranded in the desert, the deportees were initially sheltered on an army base near Columbus, New Mexico. Most would never return to Bisbee, despite appeals to President Woodrow Wilson. A federal commission censured the expulsion as "wholly illegal", yet the perpetrators evaded justice. **H**

Danny Bird is staff writer on BBC History Magazine

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ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

THE BIG QUESTION

Should **period dramas** reflect modern sensibilities?

From *The Forsyte Saga* in the 1960s to the latest season of *Bridgerton*, period drama has long been a favourite genre with TV audiences. But should such shows reflect our changing tastes as viewers, or offer an accurate view of the people and periods they depict? We asked a panel of experts



Claire Foy and Damian Lewis in the 2015 BBC adaptation of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*. The casting of its sequel has sparked a backlash in some quarters



The cast of a 2024 version of *Sense and Sensibility*. Recent period dramas have attracted more diverse viewers, argues Amanda-Rae Prescott

// Filmmakers see history as material to be exploited and abused for dramatic effect //

SIMON JENKINS

The most popular films of my youth were war films. They were about how Britain won a war – and that could be any war you cared to mention. They were great fun and, mostly, patriotic rubbish.

I'm a journalist and occasional historian, and something the two professions share is a respect for the sacredness of truth. Both are in the business of bringing events to life through the power of fact, not falsification. They may sometimes be guilty of distortion and sloppy analysis, but to be plain wrong is unethical and unprofessional. The gulf between fact and fiction is one that should not be crossed – or if crossed, should stand corrected.

Many playwrights, filmmakers and novelists disagree. To them, history is a stimulus to artistic licence, material to be exploited and abused for dramatic effect. Their considerations are audience appeal, profit and, often, politics. They leave it to historians to worry about truth. This, to me, is mendacity.

I have always found 'faction' (in which real events are the basis for fiction) hard to stomach. I can appreciate 'docudrama', which dramatises the events, or the novels

of Hilary Mantel, as attempts to deepen our understanding of the past. Mantel insisted that her goal was always to be as accurate as the facts allowed. She did not deliberately create false events. The same was not true of *The Crown* and its much-documented faking of stories. The fact the team behind the show took such pains to cast actors that resembled their real-life counterparts simply added a patina of reality to the fabrication. The result was an audience ignorant of what was true or false.

I appreciate that history – as with journalism – involves selection, and that selection itself can be motivated by a desire to twist the truth. Each age puts pressure on historians to select material in a manner that respects the sensitivity or bias of nations, groups or individuals. The duty of the historian is to see behind such bias. The task is to reveal what happened, why and how.

In an age of artificial intelligence and online 'deep fakery', the truth has never been more precious. The world of fiction has no need to be a parasite on history: it has all of human imagination to supply it with plots. Every work that claims to be 'based on real events' should, in my view, be vetted for lies, and should display a large 'T' or 'NT' – true or not true. Artistic licence should not be a licence to deceive.



Simon Jenkins is an author, *Guardian* columnist and BBC broadcaster. His books include *A Short History of London: The Creation of a World Capital* (Viking, 2019)

// Streaming services are bringing dramas to wider and more diverse audiences than ever //

AMANDA-RAE PRESCOTT

Period dramas should of course reflect modern sensitivities and changing views of the past. They are, after all, made first and foremost to entertain audiences. They are not documentaries about particular people, periods or places, and viewers are well aware that such dramas are based on creative interpretations of real events or of novels, plays or other works of fiction.

Social media and streaming services are bringing period drama to wider and more culturally diverse international audiences than ever before. For example, the Hallmark Channel's recent adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* successfully recreated the Regency period while having a predominantly Black cast and core creative team.

For too long the idea that modernisation is inherently damaging to history itself has been used as an excuse to gate-keep historical drama based on race, ethnicity and other forms of identity, even though we know that historical records often excluded or marginalised the stories and experiences of some groups of people.

Casting controversies surrounding Channel 5's *Anne Boleyn* and the BBC's



Claire Foy starring alongside Matt Smith in *The Crown*. The fact that the Netflix drama's actors so closely resembled their real-life counterparts "added a patina of reality to the fabrication", says Simon Jenkins

upcoming *Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light* [both of which employ colour-blind casting] have, in my view, less to do with the substance of life in the Tudor era than with a refusal to accept the presence of actors of colour in some forms of historical drama.

Some critics of modernised period dramas have also conflated different types of show: adaptations of fiction and biographies targeted at teenagers and young adults on the one hand, and those aimed at wider, adult audiences on the other. Recent biographical drama *Dickinson*, based on the life of 19th-century US poet Emily Dickinson, attracted criticism due to its focus on its lead character's personal life and emotions. Its support of the theory that Dickinson was queer drew particular ire. Yet it was aimed not at historians but at a young audience drawn to its interpretation of historical events and figures in non-textbook ways.

The view that modernisation is a negative force has also been used to gate-keep screenwriters influenced by other genres of fiction and pop culture. But modern language and music can enhance a period drama's ability to connect historical themes to contemporary audiences. The 2016–17 drama *Underground*, for instance, set in the Southern US and following the stories of enslaved people in Georgia, used rap and hip-hop to evoke its characters' quests for freedom and justice.

GETTY IMAGES



Amanda-Rae Prescott is a Black and Multiracial freelance journalist from New York City who reports on period dramas for American audiences

// The most exciting dramas challenge our perception of the familiar and revered //

MADELEINE PELLING

Period drama has always reflected the concerns of its era. Equally, it can effect tangible change. In 2010, *Downton Abbey* ushered in a surge of interest in country houses, bolstering Britain's heritage industry. Likewise, during the 2014 independence referendum in Scotland, then prime minister David Cameron discussed with TV executives the possible effect that *Outlander* [which sees a 20th-century nurse transported back to 18th-century Scotland] might have on voters.

With this great power comes responsibility. One of the biggest complaints made about period drama is inaccuracy. In our moment of fake news and AI, should we worry about shows that seemingly set aside the truth and the effect they might have? Certainly, their relevance to contemporary culture has never been so pertinent.

For some viewers of *The Crown*, for instance, depiction of the tabloid harassment of Diana, Princess of Wales is all the more charged thanks to media treatment of Meghan Markle and Kate Middleton. Similarly, while many lauded *Bridgerton* for its diversity and its representation, some historians argue that the show

obscures histories of slavery, the effects of which are still being felt today.

But despite our ability to immediately fact-check the details of shows online, we should pause weighing in on what's an increasingly polarised debate. It's easy to dismiss so-called mistakes without really considering the expertise and, crucially, choices behind a show. Many are based on the research of historians (2017 drama *Harlots* is based on Hallie Rubenhold's 2005 non-fiction book *The Covent Garden Ladies*, for example, while Mike Leigh's 2018 film *Peterloo* was based on work by Jacqueline Riding), but they are just that – based on. There might also be on-set historical advisors, but they are just one cog in a creative machine alongside scriptwriters, directors, actors, costume designers and more, all working to tell a story.

We are becoming more lenient, too. Gone are the days of media storms in anachronistic teacups. In my view, the most exciting period dramas are those that take ideas from the past and reconstitute them, challenging our perception of the familiar and revered. They show us where we have come from, but also where we're going. They are, ultimately, art, and ought to be viewed as such. What's more – as this piece proves – they get us talking.



Madeleine Pelling is an author, historian and broadcaster. Her books include *Writing on the Wall: Graffiti, Rebellion and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Profile, 2024)



The history behind the drama

Find out the facts that inspired screen fiction on our website: historyextra.com/tv-film



Nyree Dawn Porter as Irene Forsyte in the BBC's 1967 adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga*. The progressive attitudes it depicts reveal more about its source material than changing tastes, says Fern Riddell

// The attitudes we think of as modern have been fought over in every century before our own //

FERN RIDDELL

In my view, protests about diverse casts, LGBTQ inclusion, or the portrayal of independent female characters in period dramas are often made by people clinging to a sanitised version of the past they remember from childhood. Open any good history book today, however, and you'll find that diverse communities have always been a part of life in Britain. From black British Tudors to transgender spies, suffragette terrorists and LGBTQ icons, the nation's history has never been one-dimensional.

One of the easiest ways to time-travel back to explore that rich cultural legacy is through a series of novels on which one of the most famous period dramas is based: John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*. It begins in the 1880s and tells the intricate history of a wealthy London family across several generations. Galsworthy grew up in the Victorian era and experienced it first-hand, and the series is an incredible exploration of

female sexuality, independence and agency, set against the backdrop of the fiercely patriarchal 19th century. In its pages we meet Young Jolyon, a man in his fifties, who declares: "I am what they call a 'feminist', I believe." Irene, the titular heroine, leaves her sexually abusive marriage to live independently.

Watching *The Forsyte Saga* on television [on the BBC in the 1960s and ITV in the 2000s] you might assume that these are simply modern day attitudes, projected back by a screenwriter – but they aren't at all. Instead, Galsworthy was portraying the world around him, and a society he knew intimately.

The attitudes we think of as modern – equality, identity and representation – have been fought for and argued over by people in every century before our own. The only disservice drama can do to its audience is to attempt to whitewash or sanitise the lives of people in the past. But our true history, for authors and screenwriters alike, is much more exciting than any nostalgic invention. **H**



Fern Riddell is a cultural historian, presenter and author. She was a historical consultant for the TV drama *Ripper Street*



Nicolas Kinloch was a historian, teacher, traveller and regular contributor to *BBC History Magazine*

OBITUARY

Nicolas Kinloch (1954–2024)

Few school history teachers make a national impact on the shape of the subject, but Nicolas Kinloch, head of history for many years at Netherhall School, Cambridge, was a major influence on the development of government policy on history teaching, as well as a traveller, textbook writer and a regular contributor to, and columnist for, *BBC History Magazine*.

As his former pupils have been lining up online to say, Kinloch was an inspirational classroom teacher. His lessons were lively and memorable, and he was introducing pupils to non-European history long before it became widespread practice. One commented: "He did so much to combat racism in the early 1980s. He challenged every incident and taught all students about African history." He was himself black, though he studiously avoided identity politics.

Kinloch was a leading figure in the Historical Association, serving as its deputy president and heading its Cambridge branch. He was an inspirational mentor of trainee history teachers, working with Cambridge Assessment in the training of teachers and examiners in central Asia.

Such a setting was no surprise: Kinloch was an intrepid traveller, and his house was full of art from Africa and Asia. He was also a fine academic historian, with passions ranging from early modern Sweden to the Mongols. We are lucky to have known him. **H**

Seán Lang, senior lecturer in history at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge



MICHAEL WOOD ON... THE SHAKESPEARE AUTHORSHIP QUESTION

// The moral of this Shakespearean tale? Always trust your primary sources! //

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His latest book is *In the Footsteps of Du Fu* (Simon & Schuster, 2023). You'll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

B B C

EVERY NOW AND AGAIN IN HISTORY, CERTAIN things need restating. It's an obvious point, but like journalists, historians build their picture of the past using sources. They distinguish between primary and secondary sources, sources you can trust, others maybe you cannot. And primary sources – first hand, contemporary, authoritative, corroborated – are the basis of any historical narrative. This is a key principle of historical research. It all comes down to interpretation of the evidence. What does this document tell me? What is the authority of this text? Can I be sure that what it tells me is true? Am I reading it to corroborate a picture I've already decided on?

Recently, the Shakespeare authorship controversy – the idea that someone other than William Shakespeare wrote his plays and poems – has been getting an airing again, even in the pages of the *Daily Telegraph*.

The authorship question is a modern phenomenon. It was not something that occurred to the author's contemporaries, and does not appear in 16th or 17th-century discussions of Shakespeare – its first manifestation is in the mid-19th century. Recent suggestions that contemporaries like the author Francis Meres or the poet John Marston are teasing us with coded references to the alternative identity of The Talented Mr S are fantasy.

A whole web of connections in primary sources – the wills of Shakespeare and his colleagues, property leases, share documents, notes in the College of Heralds, the biographical details in the First Folio dedications – show beyond doubt that William Shakespeare of Stratford-up-

on-Avon was also the actor, poet and playwright, member of the Chamberlain's Men and the King's Men, shareholder in the Globe Company and 'Gentleman and Groom of the King's Most Honourable Privy Chamber' whom we can identify in primary sources in London. It is the same man. This picture is based entirely on primary sources, and any attempt to argue otherwise necessarily involves an attack on the authenticity of contemporary historical documents, not least Shakespeare's will.

Let's focus on just one issue that has long obsessed the doubters: the author's education. How could someone from this ordinary background have acquired the learning to write such plays, given their breadth of vision, their conversance with different social classes and their phenomenal range of sources – some indicating at least limited knowledge of several other languages? This is a red herring. Shakespeare was a top professional writer, and like all writers, plundered other people's books and plays for his plots. He didn't need to go to Venice to write *Othello*: he could borrow a guidebook from his friends.

The historian Lawrence Stone argued that Tudor England was the most literate society that had yet existed. In Elizabeth's reign alone, 160 grammar schools were opened, among them King Edward's School in Stratford, and Shakespeare came from the class who most benefited. The school's early records have not survived, but we know Shakespeare had a grammar school education that included Latin from the age of seven, and even some Greek.

This was demonstrated conclusively long ago, in a forbidding book of more than 1,500 pages by TW Baldwin. What he showed was that the pattern of quotation and allusion in the plays reveals their author had done the Tudor grammar school curriculum but not finished it. As Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, had heard from locals in Stratford in the 1690s, he was taken out of school early because of his father's financial troubles. Clearly, then, Shakespeare had not gone on to university. This fact seems to have been common knowledge in his lifetime, as we know from the remarks of students at St John's College, Cambridge who contrasted "our fellow" Shakespeare with the dull-witted university men bogged down by their unwieldy scholarship.

The moral of the tale? Always trust your primary sources! Let's end, then, with something Saul Bellow wrote in *Mr Sammler's Planet*: "It is sometimes necessary to repeat what we all know: all mapmakers should place the Mississippi in the same location and avoid originality. It may be boring but one has to know where it is. We cannot have the Mississippi flowing towards the Rockies just for a change."

The same goes for Shakespeare. Only when we know where he is, can we begin to draw his map. ■

FRAN MONKS



ILLUSTRATION BY FEMKE DE JONG



HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the emotional impact of telling upsetting stories

// We mustn't overlook the toll of surfacing traumatic histories //

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine. She is also author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)



I'VE BEEN RESEARCHING A NEW PROJECT AND have just finished one of the most harrowing books I have ever read: Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. Written in 1997, and drawing on interviews with survivors and newly discovered documents, Chang chronicled the devastating weeks during the Second Sino-Japanese War in December 1937 when the Imperial Japanese army swept into the ancient Chinese city of Nanking (now called Nanjing). What followed was the systematic rape and torture of tens of thousands of Chinese civilians. What is so disturbing about the book is the excruciating detail Chang goes into of the crimes inflicted. I imagine she didn't shirk from including the specificity of what the victims endured because she wanted to document the horror in its totality, and leave it for the public record. But there were points at which I could not continue reading.

The book was a sensation. It made me think of the toll that researching, interviewing survivors, documenting, editing and promoting the book must have had on Chang, as well as the responsibility to do justice to the victims.

Years later, in 2004, Chang was working on another book about another Japanese war crime, featuring the stories of Filipinos and Americans forced to travel across the Philippines on the 1942 Bataan Death March. One morning, Chang took her own life at the age of 36, after

experiencing depression. It's impossible to know what connection, if any, there was to her work.

The author and journalist Sathnam Sanghera, in his 2024 book *Empireworld*, considers the impact that reading about colonial violence has on historians who analyse such accounts on an almost daily basis. He quotes James Robins, author of 2020's *When We Dead Awaken: Australia, New Zealand, and the Armenian Genocide*, who lost the ability to fall comfortably asleep during the five years he spent studying that subject and had uncovered "a reservoir of pain" among scholars of such events.

Writing in the *The New Republic*, Robins documents the symptoms experienced by historians involved in traumatic research, including "insomnia, rapid weight gain or loss, abuse of booze or pills, unexplainable anger or fear, paralysing anxieties". "Some reactions," he continues, "are more subtle: the sudden unwillingness to watch a particular film or read graphic news reports, claustrophobia in a crowd. Traditionally, we've supposed that these kinds of reactions would afflict only first-hand witnesses to violence: the victims, the bystanders, maybe the journalists... Historians, by contrast, have neither seen nor heard the catastrophes they study – they've reached them through imagination and immersion."

Robins is not alone in hearing these kinds of stories. I've spoken to fellow oral historians about the heaviness

that comes from collecting traumatic testimonies, and from sifting through archival accounts of the worst of crimes. It doesn't make for great small talk when you're asked what you do for a living.

I remember, at one of the first events that were held to publicise my book based on recordings of first-hand partition testimonies, being asked by an audience member about the impact of hearing so many harrowing accounts. I was completely flooded. What my interviewees had gone through was far, far worse than listening to them. Although I still believe that, I am now less dismissive of the emotional effect of documenting such stories and events.

Many factors shape which histories are remembered and recorded. One reason some histories remain hidden for as long as they do is that testimonies recounting horrific crimes are too awful: too awful to research, to say out loud, to hear or to collectively acknowledge. This is all the more true when they bring up questions of shame, guilt or justice. Historians can take some solace in the redemptive nature of surfacing these histories, but we mustn't overlook the toll it takes on the bearer. **H**



Japanese troops survey the ruined streets of Nanking, December 1937. Kavita Puri describes Iris Chang's 1997 account of the Nanking massacre as "one of the most harrowing books I've ever read"



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LETTERS



French military officer Philippe Kieffer. Reader Simon Piney highlights his role in D-Day

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Pet protectors

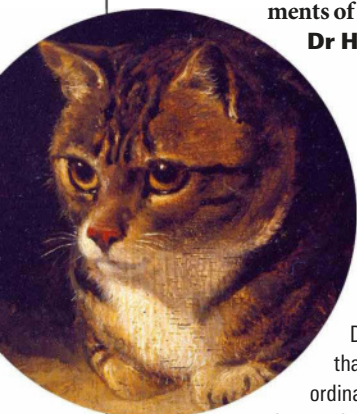
I'm pleased that Helen Cowie covered the work of the RSPCA across 200 years (April). She explained that "pets had initially been excluded from the RSPCA's operations". But MP Joseph Pease secured the protection of dogs and "other domestic animals" in 1835, and by 1849 the Cruelty to Animals Prevention Act included cats as well as dogs.

While the state provided these basic legal protections to domestic animals, we know from contemporary sources that it wasn't only constables who acted to uphold the new laws. Cases of domestic animal cruelty found their way into the courts at the urging of local people, with convictions subsequently secured on their evidence.

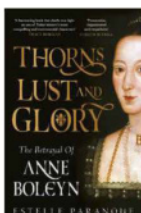
One cat skinner, for instance, was found guilty on the testimony of the main witness, a woman who saw the disposal of the unfortunate cat on a dung heap. Another case saw two habitual cat skimmers sentenced to seven years' transportation to Australia after they were found guilty of theft. Again, this was thanks to the intervention of a passersby, who harangued the women when they were observed stealing cats from the street and gave evidence in court.

Records show many such examples of Londoners, often from its poorest areas, actively protecting cats. While it's good to acknowledge the RSPCA's past history, it's also useful to recognise the achievements of ordinary people.

Dr Hilda Kean, Hastings



A cat as depicted in an 1817 painting. Dr Hilda Kean argues that the efforts of ordinary people were vital in stopping animal cruelty



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Thorns, Lust and Glory: The Betrayal of Anne Boleyn** by Estelle Paranque. Read our review on page 72

Normandy heroes

The otherwise excellent article on D-Day (*Normandy's Forgotten Heroes*, June), seems to me to feature one error and one omission.

The error is to refer to the landings as an 'invasion'. Both Winston Churchill – and, to this day, the French – refer to the *debarquement* as a liberation. This is more than a semantic quibble: it underlines the fact that Allied troops were not an invading force but, instead, a massive armed intervention to free France and, subsequently, the rest of western Europe from Nazi tyranny.

What's missing is any mention of the participation of French troops, who were involved in both the planning and execution of the landings. I had the honour on a few occasions to meet Commandant Philippe Kieffer, who on D-Day had landed along with 177 French commandos on Sword Beach.

Simon Piney, Eastcombe

Brushes with greatness

Your feature about airborne forces in the Second World War (*The Spearhead of the Invasion*, June) brought back memories. As a National Serviceman from 1956 to 1958, I spent my time on the permanent staff of the TA Parachute Brigade, which was then under the command of Brigadier John Frost. Of course, I was too young and ignorant to know anything of his wartime exploits. Only much later did I learn of the Bruneval raid and the 1944 battle of Arnhem, with the help of [1977 film] *A Bridge Too Far*.

During my service I had the privilege of meeting, among others, General Gale and Colonel Alistair Pearson, who won four DSOs [Distinguished Service Orders] on parachute operations. For an innocent like me, this was quite an experience.

John Savage, Suffolk

Global games

I enjoyed Matthew Parker's balanced and thought-provoking article (*The Empire's Last Hurrah*, May) about the British Empire Exhibition held in Wembley Park in 1924. As he explained, the exhibition's aim was to promote unity and understanding, and to showcase British industry and enterprise. But its location now seems ironic, because it could be argued that games such as football did more to foster mutual understanding than overblown exhibitions.

As the 19th century turned into the 20th, British business was at its global peak, and wherever businessmen went they took their games with them. Local populations were at first simply intrigued to watch football being



Mohun Bagan AC's players pictured in 1911. Reader Ian Collis cites the football club as an example of the enduring cultural legacy of the British empire

played by sailors, soldiers and engineers, but soon found it could be easily learnt.

Within a few years they could play just as well as the expats, and formed their own clubs or supplanted British players in established colonial clubs. After a decade or two, they could equal and sometimes beat their British teachers. In 1911, for example, the Kolkata club Mohun Bagan AC beat the East Yorkshire Regiment 2-1 in the final of the Indian Football Association shield.

The 1924 Wembley exhibition tried to tell a comforting imperial story of British industry selflessly fostering economic and



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➤ Page 46



social progress in the colonies and protectorates. Few would subscribe to such a story now – yet the legacy of Britain's time as a global power can still be seen and heard on cricket grounds, rugby fields and football pitches around the world.

Ian Collis, Derby

Two weeks' notice

I read with interest the Q&A entry exploring the origins of the word 'fortnight' (May). About 40 years ago, when I was a Girl Guide leader, I visited Wisconsin and spent a day with a Girl Scout leader. During our conversation I used the word and, when I explained it to her, she replied: "Oh, that's like our 'sennight', [meaning] a week." We went on to discuss the many other words that differ in our two languages, illustrating how they diverged over time. What's amazing is that 'fortnight' still persists in British English!

Ann Munday, Reading

Chair of the bored?

It is misguided to say that the royal love chair (Q&A, May) was to help Prince Albert "better entertain the famous courtesans" of the Paris brothel. It is surely most likely

that they found the prince's whims far from entertaining, and instead rather tedious. If anything, the chair [pictured left] was probably used to entertain the prince rather than the other way round. That said, the courtesans might, I suppose, have been inadvertently amused by his antics.

John McIntosh,
Edinburgh



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“IT’S TIME
TO WRITE
WOMEN BACK
INTO THESE
WORLD-CHANGING
ANCIENT EVENTS”

Daisy Dunn tells the story of the Greco-Persian Wars through the deeds of the extraordinary female figures who shaped them



Prime mover

A bust of the Persian queen Atossa, wife of Darius I. It was at Atossa's suggestion that Darius launched an invasion of Greece, sparking four decades of war

"Though I conquered you in battle while you still lived," began Queen Tomyris of the Massagetae, a nomadic tribe that ranged the Eurasian steppe, "You have utterly destroyed me." The man she addressed was Cyrus the Great, founding king of the first Persian 'Achaemenid' empire – or at least, he had been. Now, his severed head dangled from the

queen's hands in a blood-soaked bag.

We can only imagine how deeply this episode haunted Cyrus's daughter Atossa. It is hardly surprising that when her husband, Darius I of Persia, set out to invade the territory of an equally aggressive nomadic tribe 17 years later, in about 513 BC, she did her best to dissuade him. Darius hoped making war on the Scythians would strengthen his empire's eastern border. Would it not be better, Atossa asked him, to confront the Greeks instead?

Darius disregarded Atossa's advice. Little did he know, however, that he would one day be forced to do precisely what she'd suggested. Following a revolt of city-states, the Persians went into battle with the Greeks, triggering the outbreak of the Greco-Persian Wars.

The wars between the two powers in the first half of the fifth century BC were some of the most destructive in classical history. Fought across land and sea, the Greco-Persian Wars changed the landscape of the two mighty empires. They resulted in victory for the Greek city-states, though at a considerable cost. While the historical narrative of these events is populated by the men who led the various battles, women played important roles, which have too often been overlooked.

What follows is an account of the wars foregrounded, as far as is possible, by the women who were there.

Power and persuasion

The story of the Greco-Persian Wars through the eyes of women begins with Atossa. Like many eastern kings, her husband Darius was polygamous, but of the six principal women in his harem, Atossa was the most politically engaged. According to Herodotus, the premier historian of the wars and a citizen of Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum in Turkey), Atossa had "the totality of power" at court. This might have been an exaggeration, but she was certainly involved in her husband's political work and would credibly have offered him advice on foreign affairs.

Atossa held additional authority as the daughter of the founding king of the first Persian empire, a leader who had conquered swathes of Asia Minor, including Media and



Flower power

This gold ornament from the 6th–4th centuries BC shows a Persian woman tending lotus flowers. Female concubines, bakers and cooks would have accompanied the Persian armies into war

Croesus's famously wealthy kingdom of Lydia, and extended his reach from the Aegean coast to modern Afghanistan and Pakistan. His downfall was Queen Tomyris, to whom he had initially proposed marriage. Believing he wanted little more than her land, she turned him down. Cyrus responded to the rebuff by launching his invasion, engaging in what Herodotus described as "the hardest of all the battles ever fought by non-Greeks". The mighty Massagetae massacred the Persian forces and Tomyris fulfilled her earlier threat to give Cyrus his fill of blood.

It may certainly be argued that Cyrus's tragedy shaped Atossa's decision to discourage her husband from pursuing the nomads. Herodotus's claim that her advice to Darius was prompted by her desire to add female slaves from Sparta, Corinth, Argos and Athens to her household could hardly have been her real motivation. As if the experience of her father was not deterrent enough, there was more to be gained from launching an expedition against the Greeks than from pursuing elusive tribesmen – and women – across an unforgiving landscape.

Eventually, Atossa was able to persuade her husband to send a small detachment into Greek territory, but according to Herodotus, this was done on the initiative of her doctor.

Atossa had "the totality of power" at court and was certainly involved with her husband's political work



Running the show

A bronze figure from c500 BC depicting a Spartan woman. Sparta led the Greek city-states' fight against the Persians at Thermopylae – thanks, in part, to the quick-thinking of its queen, Gorgo

Atossa had summoned her medic to examine her after noticing an alarming swelling on her breast. The doctor said that he could cure her, but that he wanted something in return, namely to lead a command against the Greeks. Atossa had little choice but to speak to Darius on her doctor's behalf in exchange for a prescription for an ointment. The ointment miraculously worked (she was perhaps suffering from inflammatory mastitis), Atossa recovered, and her doctor was permitted to lead a detachment of 15 Persians to reconnoitre Greek territory.

Unfortunately for Atossa, whose own persuasions Herodotus dramatically underplayed in his account, the Greek enterprise proved unpromising, so Darius left, as planned, for the land of the Scythians. He would score merely a hollow victory over them.

It is frequently forgotten that the case for invading Greek territory was first made by Atossa. This is largely because more than 20 years passed before she finally secured her Greek invasion.

Rather than launch a pre-emptive strike, as he might have done earlier, Darius now had to begin on the back foot. The Persians were sucked into conflict with the Greeks as a result of the so-called Ionian Revolt. Its roots stretched back to when Cyrus the Great had forced the coastal cities of the Greek territory of Ionia to submit and pay tribute to Persia. Demoralised by their situation and the authority of their Persian satraps (governors), the people of Ionia had now begun to make a bid for freedom, which naturally threatened Darius's authority.

One of the most intriguing witnesses to

these events was a princess of Sparta named Gorgo. She was only eight or nine years old, but she allegedly sat in on the negotiations held between her father, Cleomenes I of Sparta, and Aristagoras, tyrant of Miletus, and cautioned against Sparta's involvement in the rebellion. Aristagoras prevailed upon Athens and Eretria for support instead and secured a number of ships. The Ionians were successful enough to infiltrate the Persian city of Sardis and burn down its hallowed temple of the mother goddess Cybele.

Watershed moment

Darius now focused on retaliating against the staunchest Ionian rebels. The Persians were successful in putting down the revolt. Encouraged, Darius dispatched a naval taskforce to put Eretria to flame before confronting the Athenians at Marathon, a wide plain near the coast of Euboea, in 490 BC. The battle of Marathon marked a watershed in east-west relations. The Athenians, bolstered by a powerful contingent from Plataea (a city lying south of Thebes in Boeotia), routed a considerably larger Persian force. Darius, shaken by the unexpected defeat, finally vowed to launch a fully-fledged expedition against the Greeks.

In practice, it fell to his son Xerxes to carry out the campaign, for Darius died four years after Marathon. Darius had already had sons when he married Atossa, but chose to make Xerxes, the first of four sons she bore him, his heir. The women of Persia played some part in the war preparations. They would have been employed, for example, in weaving the colourful tapestries and garlands which adorned the Persian soldiers in a magnificent battle procession described by Herodotus. There were also female concubines, bakers and cooks in the Persian entourage.

As the Persians progressed, bridging the Hellespont and subjugating peoples as far as their allies in Macedonia, news of the invasion travelled across the Greek mainland. The most well-documented recipient of the military intelligence was Gorgo, now a young woman. It was said that when some blank writing tablets arrived in Sparta, she alone knew how to interpret them. Writing tablets took the form of wooden supports covered in wax upon which a message could be inscribed. While the men shrugged their shoulders, Gorgo perceived that the tablets might not be blank after all. The wax was removed at her suggestion to reveal a secret message inscribed in the wood beneath. A defector from the Persians had written to inform the Spartans of Xerxes' movements. Thanks to Gorgo, his information was passed on.

Gorgo consequently earned the admiration of her people as the Spartans came

Women of the Greco-Persian Wars

together in an attempt to prevent the Persians from pouring into Greece via the narrow mountain pass of Thermopylae. The princess's husband, her father's half-brother Leonidas, led the famous crack force of 300 to defend the site in the summer of 480 BC. The Spartans had little hope of success against the Persian onslaught but put up a brave resistance over the course of three days. Leonidas took the lead in inspiring his men through his own courage. The 300 were mercilessly hacked down, but Gorgo was hailed the wife of a true hero.

Sabotage at sea

It now fell to another young woman to halt the Persian advance. This time the defence would need to be conducted on water, for while Xerxes' land army stormed to triumph at Thermopylae, his naval forces were preparing to confront the Greeks off the coast of Artemisium in northern Euboea (a large island in Greece). Thanks to the support of the Phoenicians, who possessed the most powerful war vessels known at that time, the Persian navy was without equal. The Persians had every reason to anticipate success. Nothing, however, could have prepared them for the storms stirred up by the winds off Mount Pelion in Thessaly. It was while they were moored here, awaiting battle, that a girl named Hydna arrived on the scene.

An accomplished swimmer from Scione, a port town on the north Aegean coast, Hydna was said to have swum towards the ships under cover of night with her father. On reaching the Persian ships, the pair surreptitiously began to cut the anchors and ropes beneath, causing the vessels to knock into each other and inflict further damage in the strong winds. An estimated 400 ships were destroyed in the course of the storm. Many had been carrying crucial food supplies. Hydna may in reality have given her fellow



TITANIC STRUGGLE A timeline of the Greco-Persian Wars

c545 BC

The city-states of the Greek territory of **Ionia** **submit** and pay tribute to Cyrus the Great.

530 BC

Cyrus, founder of the 'Achaemenid' Persian empire, is killed by the Massagetae tribe.

c513 BC

Darius I of Persia launches an invasion of Scythian territories on the Eurasian steppe, but secures only an unsatisfying victory.

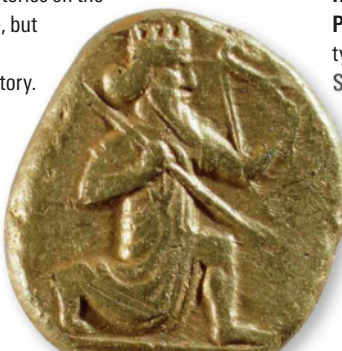
499 BC

Beginning of the **Ionian Revolt of city-states against Persian rule**. Aristagoras, tyrant of Miletus, travels to Sparta, among other Greek city-states, to build support for the revolution.

493 BC

The **Persians reconquer Ionia** but experience resistance from city-states including Athens.

A daric (gold coin) depicting Darius I of Persia as a royal archer





Queen of the high seas

A votive stele (a stone tablet) dedicated to Artemisia, here surrounded by 12 gods. She was the sole female commander on either side of the Greco-Persian Wars and led five ships in a major battle

For many of the women left behind, these years were characterised by uncertainty and terror

Greeks only a small advantage, but she would be remembered for centuries afterwards for her heroism, not least of all by Emperor Nero, who carried a statue of her erected at Delphi away to Rome.

The Greek fleet at Artemisium, to which Corinth, Sparta, Eretria and Athens had contributed ships, was still far smaller than Xerxes' offering. For three days, the Greeks did their best to resist the Persian onslaught, but their ships were soon so depleted that they had little option but to withdraw from battle. In so doing, they granted Persia a less than satisfying victory.

The nameless women

We must remember that the Greco-Persian Wars consisted of more than a series of battles and skirmishes. For many of the women and children left behind, these years were characterised by deep uncertainty and terror. In the wake of Persia's successes, many people fled Attica, the territory of which Athens formed a part, and sought refuge on the nearby island of Salamis. Others left Delphi in Phocis for the relative safety of Achaia, western Greece. But not everyone escaped in time. Many were intercepted on their way by

490 BC

The Athenians and Plataeans defeat the Persians at the **battle of Marathon**.

486 BC

Death of Darius I of Persia and the **succession of Xerxes**.

Xerxes, one of the kings of Persia, led an invasion of Greece in 480 BC, which ended in a Persian defeat

480 BC

Leonidas leads a crack force of **300 Spartans to defend the pass of Thermopylae** from the Persian advance, but the Spartans are obliterated. The Persians triumph at Artemisium and raid Athens. The Athenians defeat the Persian fleet off the waters of Salamis.

479 BC

The **battle of Plataea** sees the Greeks defeat the Persians on land and the Persian fleet near Mycale. The next year Athens and other city-states forge a defensive **coalition known as the Delian League**.

448 BC

After decades of sparring, the Persians acknowledge the independence of the Ionians. This traditionally marks the **end of the Greco-Persian Wars**.



Persians returning from the battle of Thermopylae. Herodotus's *Histories* record the harrowing detail of women from Phocis being gang-raped to death.

Historians have long celebrated the heroism of Leonidas and the 300. We should never forget the nameless women who fell in their shadow.

Wisdom and honour

Following their victory, the Persians were able to gain control of Attica and the surrounding areas after ravaging and plundering the Acropolis at Athens. Feeling that they had nothing to lose, the Athenians resolved to offer battle at sea once again, off the waters of Salamis. While the Persian military was eager to vanquish them once and for all, Xerxes hesitated, and with good reason. One of his key allies had cautioned against further engagement on water.

Artemisia, queen of Halicarnassus, had come to power following the death of her husband, and held the distinction of being the sole female commander on either side of the Greco-Persian Wars. She had lent Xerxes five superlative ships and now advised that he tread carefully. Spare the ships, she urged his deputy Mardonius, for "[the Greek] men are stronger than yours by sea just as men in general are stronger than women".

Herodotus, who was accustomed to inventing speeches for his characters, especially women, clearly recognised the wisdom of Artemisia's advice. Xerxes, too, accepted that it was only too prudent. And yet, he felt fit to disregard it and chose instead to satisfy his men and send ships to Salamis. He quickly regretted this, for the Athenians, pretending to be intent on flight, deceived the Persians into approaching at night and then took them by surprise.

Artemisia had joined the campaign she had advised against and experienced such chaos on the water that she had to sink an allied ship in order to free herself from danger. According to Herodotus, one of the Persians exclaimed to Xerxes: "Master, do you see Artemisia, how well she fights and has sunk an enemy ship?" It was in response to this that Xerxes was supposed to have uttered his immortal line: "My men have become women, and my women, men." Although the Persians were worsted in the battle, the king proceeded to reward Artemisia with a set of Greek armour. The ship's male captain, meanwhile, received a most insulting present of a woman's distaff and spindle.

The victorious Greeks put a bounty on taking Artemisia alive but found themselves thwarted. Xerxes was able to prevail upon the heroic queen for advice once again as he

Artemisia was a rare example of a woman who was recognised for her role in confronting men in battle



Warrior queen

A c4th-century BC statue of Artemisia. The queen of Halicarnassus waged war on the Greeks alongside King Xerxes I of Persia, and became one of his most trusted military advisors

weighed up leading an attack on the Peloponnese or leaving his men to deliver the territory to him while he returned home. Artemisia favoured the latter course and, this time, Xerxes listened. As he prepared to make the journey home, he entrusted some of his illegitimate sons to Artemisia, bidding her to take them safely to Ephesus in western Asia Minor. To Xerxes's enduring regret, the Greeks were able to secure a decisive victory over his remaining land forces at Plataea in 479 BC, and later that same year, in a final naval victory off the Asian coast at Mycale.

The Greeks, after a difficult start, had emerged triumphant. They would now concentrate on strengthening their defence against future Persian hostilities by establishing the alliance known as the Delian League.

Liberation and legacy

The Greco-Persian Wars had seen man confront man on the battlefield and at sea. There had been, as ever, a scarcity of women on the frontline. And yet women had played their own part in the conflict, and Hydna and Gorgo are just two whose stories were considered significant enough in antiquity to be recorded. Artemisia was a rare example of a woman who was recognised for her role in confronting men in battle. A statue of her was put up like a trophy in a new marble portico at Sparta paid for out of war spoils. Her name ought to be as famous today as that of Xerxes, who returned to Persia a weakened king, destined to be killed by a member of his own guard.

Many other women contributed to the liberation of the cities of Ionia from Persian control or paid for it with their lives. It is a failure of the historical sources that they remain nameless.

The Greeks would enjoy supremacy until the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC pitched them against each other in the near-equivalent of a world war. Sparta and her allies would ultimately triumph over Athens and her allies after securing the support of Persia. The world map would once again be redrawn and, as before, women would play a considerable role in shaping it. **H**

ALAMY

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Daisy Dunn is an author and classicist. Her new book, *The Missing Thread: A New History of the Ancient World Through the Women Who Shaped It*, is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson



In Our Time on BBC Radio 4 explores
The Battle of Thermopylae:
bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p004y278





War and pieces

Far from idle pursuits, games have transformed the way societies have made sense of life and death, order and conflict for centuries. **Kelly Clancy** picks five examples that reveal how playtime has often been a serious business

Games are among our most enduring cultural technologies. They persist, in part, because they're a way for our brains to serve themselves pleasure for free. The Greek historian Herodotus, for instance, wrote about the Lydian people, who reportedly suffered an 18-year famine. He claimed they alternated between eating food one day and playing games the next – play, in other words, lessened the sting of hunger.

But games aren't just fun: they are also essential education. Animals play to practise for the serious demands of adulthood: kittens chase yarn to drill hunting skills, for example, and young kangaroos rough-house to prepare to box their way up the social hierarchy as adults. With the invention of games, humans brought play into the realm of thought, because games exercise various mental functions.

Games are especially crucial for developing social skills. Plato believed they were the foundation of civic education, arguing that children who learned to follow game rules would grow up to be law-abiding citizens. And Plato wasn't alone: scholars across history have lauded games for a range of educational virtues. As a result, people often endowed games with cultural principles they hoped to transmit to future generations. Games are messages from the past, and can reveal the values and beliefs of the people who play them.

A 14th-century depiction of a game of draughts. Such pastimes have been a part of societies across millennia



Passing into the afterlife

The ancient board game that carried players to the immortal realm

Senet – likely the ancestor of backgammon – is one of the world's oldest known board games. It originated in ancient Egypt in around 3100 BC as mammoths still roamed Siberia's Wrangel Island, hieroglyphic writing was just emerging, and camels were first being domesticated. Senet means 'passing', possibly referring to the game's race-like mechanic: players vied to be the first to move all their pieces across the board by casting sticks or knucklebones. In the earliest known record of trash talk, a senet player depicted in the tomb of Pepyankh in Egypt brags: "You speak as one weak of tongue, for passing is mine."

Though its origins were secular, senet

Previous page

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The black queen and king from the late 12th/early 13th-century Lewis chess set; a Mesoamerican ballgame player as shown in a sixth-century relief; a board and pieces from the ancient game senet; and two dice, examples of which pre-date recorded history



Nefertiti enjoys a game of senet in this wall painting in her 13th-century BC tomb. What began as a secular game soon gained religious connotations

came, over time, to serve as a map for the soul's journey after death. Senet makes several appearances in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, a collection of magic spells inscribed inside coffins to help souls successfully navigate the netherworld.

Certain squares on the board became associated with landmarks and obstacles in the afterlife. Landing on square 27, denoted with the hieroglyphic for the 'waters of chaos', sent players back to 15, 'the house of rebirth'. Before exiting the board, pieces had to land on 26, 'the house of happiness' – the mummification chamber.

Mummification was thought to help souls recognise their corpses, the doorway to the afterlife. Although it was prohibitively expensive for many Egyptians, personal senet boards, found buried in many graves, were another way a soul might recognise its former body. As such, senet democratised access to the immortal realm, serving as an accessible map of life after death.

GETTY IMAGES



Blood sports that fostered peace

How a violent ball game helped Mesoamerica's rulers avoid conflict

More of a family of games than an individual sport, the Mesoamerican ballgame – as it's widely known – likely arose around 3,700 years ago in what's now Mexico. It remained vital for millennia among the Olmec, Maya and Aztec people. Some experts suggest it helped maintain and cohere those cultures because they used it as a proxy for war.

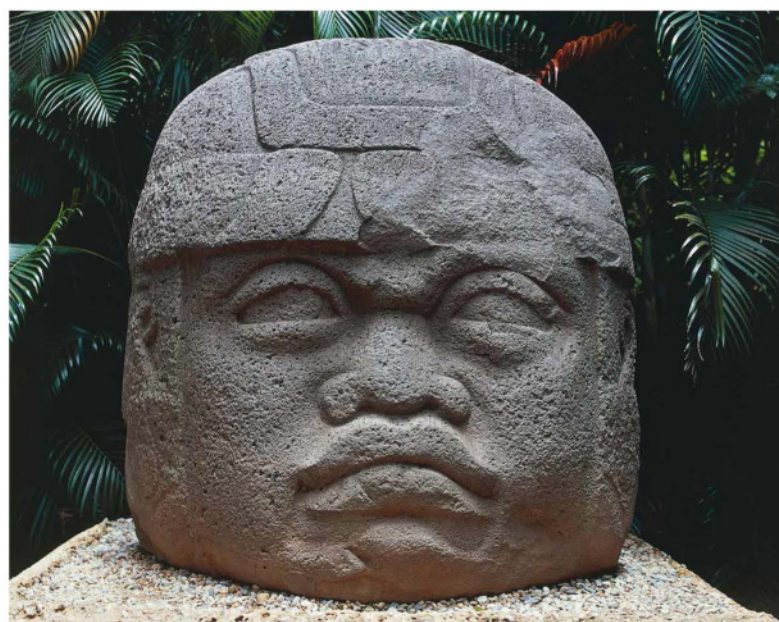
Players from opposing teams worked to keep a heavy rubber ball in the air, sometimes using sticks but most often using their hips. Points were scored by bringing the ball to the opposite end of the court, and lost if it hit the ground twice before it could be returned to the other team. A player automatically won the game for their team if they put the ball through one of the prohibitively tall hoops that lined the court.

The ball weighed up to four kilograms, so players were frequently bruised and bloodied despite wearing heavy padding. Spanish accounts note players dying after the ball hit them in the head or stomach. Injuries weren't the only danger: in some cases, play involved ritual sacrifice, and losing teams were decapitated.

In the Mayan creation myth *Popul Vuh*, human heroes play against the gods of the underworld, signifying the battle between life and death. However, the game had more than symbolic significance. Players were often important political figures, and their gaming victories may have legitimised their rise to power. Ancient Olmec art is best known for its colossal basalt heads, which are thought to be portraits of kings equipped in the regalia of ball players.

Remarkably, the game may have been partly responsible for the rise and maintenance of these complex societies because it offered leaders a more peaceful way to settle disputes than costly and destructive wars. Ball courts were particularly prevalent in hotly contested areas with many border disputes.

Other pre-Columbian American games, like *chunkey* and lacrosse, are also thought to have been peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. Indeed, some scholars argue that lacrosse was vital for maintaining peace among the Six Nations of the Iroquois.



A huge stone head in the city of Villahermosa, Mexico. It's thought these ancient sculptures may depict Olmec kings dressed ready to play a vicious, and socially vital, ballgame



A 15th-century miniature shows chess making its debut at the Persian court. Its arrival in Europe saw the adoption of pieces, and phrases, familiar today



An Indian stroke of genius

How chess honed the minds of medieval princes and early computers alike

Chess is the most popular board game in history, originating in sixth-century India as a battle simulation game. In its earliest incarnation, it was known as *chaturanga*, or 'four-limbed', referring to four ancient divisions of the Indian army: infantry, cavalry, elephantry and chariotry.

As the game percolated west, these pieces became the pawns, knights, bishops, and rooks familiar to European players. What was once a vizier piece came to be replaced by a more dynamic queen, influenced by the rise of powerful queens in Europe. Persian players would exclaim *Shāh Māt* ('the king is helpless'), which, adopted into English, became 'checkmate'. Chess is the first known game in which different pieces possess different powers, like the military regiments on which they were modelled.

Writers have long celebrated chess for honing its players' strategic skills and clarifying their thinking. Chess featured

heavily in 'mirrors for princes', a genre of books on manners popular in India, Persia and Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Playing chess was like looking into a mirror, revealing players' strengths and weaknesses to themselves. The 10th-century Abbasid scholar al-Masudi detailed how chess was used to train military strategy and mathematics.

Chess is so heavily associated with intellect that early computer pioneers took it up as a training ground for developing artificial intelligence. In 1950, Claude Shannon, the father of information theory, claimed that chess was an ideal problem for computers because it was discrete, and "generally considered to require 'thinking' for skilful play". In their quest to teach machines to play chess and other games, researchers pioneered countless computing innovations and laid the groundwork for the striking capabilities of today's machine learning systems.



Pythagoras's fading 'glory'

The mathematical medieval board game that reflected shifting views of the universe

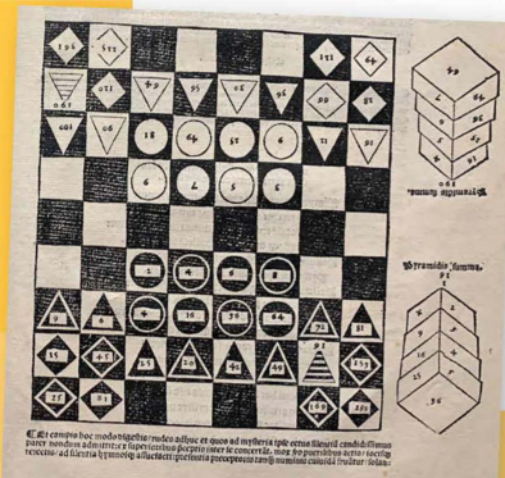
Beginning around the 11th century, rithmomachia, or 'the philosopher's game', became central to higher education in Europe. The game was thought to represent, in aesthetic form, the formal number theory of Greek polymath Pythagoras. It was a favourite pastime of monks, because church leaders believed it had an enlightening quality. Ovid hailed it as "the leaf, flower and fruit of Arithmetic, and its glory, laud and honour". Thomas More had the virtuous citizens of his 16th-century book *Utopia* play the edifying game of rithmomachia instead of morally corrosive games such as dice.

Rithmomachia is similar to chess, and its different pieces move according to distinct rules. Like chess, its players vie to capture their opponent's pieces. Unlike chess, each rithmomachia piece is inscribed with a number that dictates where and how pieces must be positioned to capture other pieces. For a 'proper' victory, the winner must arrange several of their pieces on their opponent's side of the board in a mathematical progression – 2-4-8, for example.

Pythagoras, who founded a mathematics cult that held a grip on European scholarship for more than a thousand years, proclaimed that "all is number". Unfortunately, Pythagoras did not believe in *all* numbers: he instead held that rational numbers – whole numbers such as 1, 2, 3, and simple fractions such as $\frac{1}{2}$ – were the foundation of the universe.

His cult so esteemed rational numbers that they tried to cover up the existence of irrational numbers (non-repeating decimals, including pi) – reportedly assassinating the Greek philosopher Hippasus, who had stumbled on their existence. This myopic focus on rational numbers set back European scholarship by hundreds of years.

Yet by the 17th century, new techniques borrowed from India and Persia had reinvigorated European mathematics, and rithmomachia's popularity waned as Pythagoras's ideas fell out of favour.



The complex rules of rithmomachia were influenced by principles set out by Pythagoras



Officers plot military strategy using a game of Kriegsspiel in an 1872 illustration. The system proved remarkably accurate – and enduring



Melees in miniature

Why strategists turned to war games to plot a conflict's outcome

Kriegsspiel, or 'war game', changed the face of modern Europe. Starting in the 18th century, German military strategists tinkered with chess – which was itself an abstraction of war – to create a more realistic military planning tool. Inspired by the success of the scientific method in so many other fields at the time, they hoped to recast war as a science

Using the game they devised, Kriegsspiel, new strategies could be tested and workshopped. Designers first expanded the chess board to thousands of squares, colour-coded to represent different terrains. Eventually, as map-making technology improved, the game was played on scaled maps of actual battlefields, which allowed officers to plan their real campaigns in minute detail. Each turn represented two minutes of warfare, and wooden block troops were constrained to move a realistic distance in that time. Umpires consulted

casualty tables based on actual battle data to predict each simulated action's effects. Dice throws randomised the damage from each ersatz attack.

The result was a remarkably accurate prediction engine, which German officers used to cohere the first German empire in the late 19th century. General Karl Kraft, one of the most eminent strategists of that era, wrote: "The ability to quickly arrive at decisions and the cheerful assumption of responsibility which characterised our officers in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 was in no small measure due to the war games."

General Helmuth von Moltke, meanwhile, used Kriegsspiel to rethink traditional wisdom, too: its bird's-eye view, for instance, inspired him to abandon column-and-line troop formations, which made soldiers easy targets, in favour of unstructured formations.

Today, most major militaries still use some form of game simulation in their training and

planning. The pacifist writer HG Wells published a simple tabletop war game, called *Little Wars*, in 1913 in the hope that playing at war and witnessing its horrors in miniature would inoculate people against it. *Little Wars* gave rise to a new family of tabletop war games, eventually evolving into *Dungeons and Dragons* and countless popular role-playing video games.

War games have also informed modern policy. Every outcome of *Proud Prophet*, a nuclear war simulation game played by top US officials in 1983, was so harrowing that the exercise convinced the Reagan administration to open arms control negotiations with the Soviets. ■

Kelly Clancy is a neuroscientist, physicist and author, whose book *Playing with Reality: How Games Shape Our World* is set to be published by Allen Lane in June



The ruined church at Oradour-sur-Glane, west-central France, November 1944. Five months earlier, the building had been set ablaze during a massacre perpetrated by members of the Waffen-SS

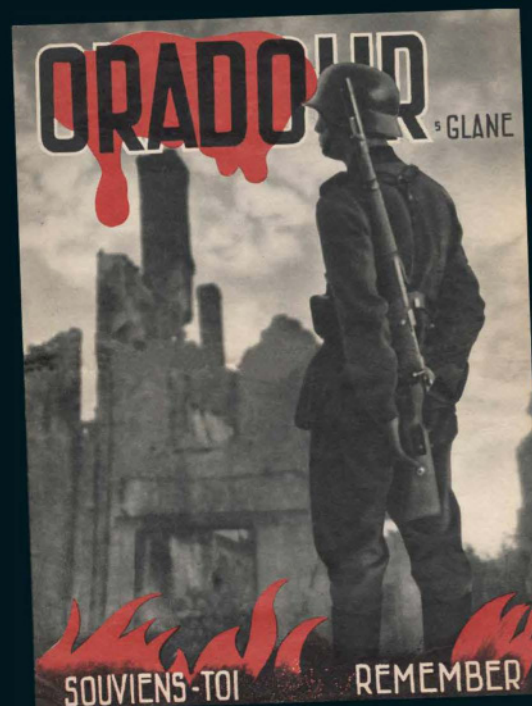
On the morning of **10 June 1944**, the residents of **Oradour-sur-Glane** were going about their lives as normally as was possible in occupied France: cooking, washing, shopping, playing.

Little did they know that they were about to become the victims of one of the **most infamous massacres** of the Second World War.

BY ROBERT PIKE



An early 20th-century image showing a street in Oradour-sur-Glane. The picturesque village frequently attracted visitors from nearby Limoges, who flocked there to fish and swim in the river Glane



The massacre would become the focus of anti-Nazi books and posters after France's liberation in 1945

The clouds had gathered over Oradour-sur-Glane on the morning of 10 June 1944, and rain threatened. At la Grange de Boeil, a hamlet nearby, Denise Bardet rose in the farmhouse she shared with her younger brother Camille and their mother Louise, a widow. It was a Saturday, and Denise's 24th birthday. She would be spending it teaching at Oradour's girls' school but planned to pedal the short journey home for a brief celebratory lunch with her mother. In the centre of the village, another resident named Odette Bouillière was sorting through what had been brought into the local post office. Odette lived in the upstairs flat overlooking Oradour's own small tram station. Her mother was staying with her for the weekend, as was her 12-year-old nephew, Robert.

By mid-morning, the early summer warmth had burnt away the rainclouds. Weekend visitors from the nearby city of Limoges had arrived by tram, and as was the norm, everybody settled down for the customary long lunch. Minds turned to what the afternoon might hold.

The people at their tables in the lower part of the village, near the river, were the first to hear a low rumble coming from the direction of Limoges and St-Victurnien. Villagers went into the street to watch as a procession of German vehicles carrying around a hundred men crossed

the bridge spanning the river Glane. As they passed, the soldiers surveyed the shops and houses along Oradour's main street. Shutters closed while shopkeepers and curious onlookers gazed on in a mix of confusion, fear and curiosity at the strange convoy which wound its way uphill, leaving the lower village with its market hall and

church behind it. Robert Hébras, who worked in Limoges and was used to seeing Germans every day, reassured his friends that this would be no more than an identity check. Many others, however, had not seen a German soldier since the beginning of the occupation.

Nobody in the village knew that a perimeter had already been established which took in all the nearest hamlets and farms. A round up was moving inwards. Whether native to Oradour or not, everybody was taken to the main market square, known as the Champ de Foire. The schools were emptied, and the children told to walk in lines led by their teachers. A seven-year-old boy named Roger Godfrin, who was a refugee from Alsace-Lorraine, took the opportunity to run away. All the others were made to wait with their teachers. Denise Bardet, an avid reader who had privately written about her love of German literature but abhorred what the Nazis had done to their country, looked after her class.

Cries of anguish

Very few people thought to hide because of the calm way the operation was conducted. Those who did hide had reason to do so. The danger of being deported to work in Germany, for example, deterred several younger men from going to the round-up. Some feared arrest because of their communist pasts. Several families had come to Oradour, a place deemed safe, because they were Jewish. One 15-year-old girl, Sarah Jakobowicz, who had only been there for just over a week, hid under a bed.

No identity checks were carried out, but there was a long wait. The mayor, Paul Desourteaux, who had already offered up himself and his family as hostages, was told that the village would be thoroughly searched for weapons, which it was claimed had been hidden there by the Resistance. Most of those in earshot were confident that nothing would be found, but this did not prevent the cries of anguish as the crowds were separated. The women and

The bodies of the dead and dying were covered with wood and phosphorous and then set alight



A memorial wall showing the faces of victims of the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre, with blank spaces reserved for those whose photographs have not yet been found

children were taken to the village's ancient church. Then the men were put into groups before being led off to barns and outbuildings. Everybody waited nervously.

After an hour or so of waiting, a noise that sounded like an explosion – possibly the discharging of a cannon – filled the air. It was a signal. Immediately, the soldiers who had been guarding the groups of men opened fire. People fell one on top of another. Those still breathing were stepped on to be delivered the coup de grace. The bodies of the dead and dying were then covered with wood and phosphorous and set alight. Buildings all around the village were set ablaze.

Inside the tiny, overcrowded church guarded by sentries, the women and children could only guess at what was happening outside. A box that had been brought inside by two soldiers began to billow black smoke, causing asphyxiation and panic. Then the doors opened, and soldiers fired inside. One woman, a grandmother called Marguerite Rouffanche, could only look on as one of her daughters was shot through the neck. She and several others managed to force open the door to the sacristy, where they hid as church furniture and other combustibles were thrown onto stacked bodies and set alight. Below the sacristy an outside door was opened, and the downstairs store was set ablaze. As the floor collapsed, Marguerite saw her other daughter – clinging to her baby – fall into the furnace below.

Somehow, Marguerite found an escape route through one of the windows behind the altar. She could not help a woman called Henriette Joyeux, who tried to pass her baby. Both died, and Marguerite was shot and assumed dead. The heat of the inferno in the church was such that the bell in the church tower melted and fell.

As smoke rose, panic set in all around the district. Worried parents of children who attended school in Oradour, but lived in hamlets outside the perimeter, were at first reassured that the children were safe. When some

tried to go to the village to find their sons or daughters, they too were shot.

In total, 643 people died. Two hundred and five children were killed, and only one – Roger Godfrin – survived because he followed the advice of his parents, who had told him to run whenever he saw German soldiers. Denise Bardet died in the church with her class while her mother back at the farm waited for her. Post mistress Odette Bouillière died, as did her mother and 12-year-old nephew. The burned corpse of Sarah Jakobowicz was later discovered under the bed that had served as her hiding place before the flames and smoke had consumed her.

The battle for justice

It was quickly established that the 3rd Company of the 1st Battalion, Der Führer Regiment – part of the SS Panzer Division Das Reich – had been responsible for the massacre. Yet, few of the perpetrators would be punished. The battalion's leader, SS-Sturmbannführer Adolf Diekmann, would be killed in Normandy two weeks later, while a French military tribunal held in 1953 failed to achieve lasting justice. Although 22 suspects were brought to Bordeaux to stand trial, only two – Georg Réne Boos and Karl Lenz – were sentenced to death. The remaining 18 men were either cleared, deemed too mentally unfit to stand trial, or sentenced to hard labour.

Yet, the story didn't end there. Thirteen of the soldiers were found to have been forced conscripts from Alsace-Lorraine, and had their sentences quickly and controversially overturned by the French parliament. In fact, all of the convicted men were able to walk free by 1958, including Boos and Lenz, who were pardoned before their death sentences could be carried out. And there were a further 44 men identified by the authorities as having been present during the massacre, but who could not be extradited owing to the complex reconciliation politics of postwar



Seven-year-old Roger Godfrin, who fled Oradour-sur-Glane as soon as he saw German soldiers, ended up being one of the massacre's few survivors

The Oradour-sur-Glane massacre



Marshal Philippe Pétain greets Adolf Hitler in the town of Montoire, October 1940. The Vichy leader's collaboration with the führer initially saw France divided into two zones, each under different levels of German control



Rural Resistance fighters, known as *maquisards*, would prove to be a thorn in the side of the Nazi regime. In a bid to justify their actions, the SS falsely claimed that Oradour-sur-Glane was shielding such people

Europe. Das Reich's overall commander, SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Lammerding, was sentenced to death in absentia, but went on to live a full life as a successful businessman in Düsseldorf.

The fact that the SS was capable of carrying out such an atrocity is itself not surprising. Built on a racist, extremist ideology that viewed its victims as less than human, its men had committed countless war crimes across the eastern front in the months leading up to the massacre. But what drove the SS to commit such an act in a country that was supposed to be collaborating with Nazi Germany? And why, out of all the villages in west-central France, was Oradour-sur-Glane selected as a target?

From occupation to atrocity

Before answering such questions, it is necessary to understand just how much France had changed in the space of four years. During the late 1930s, the country had been ruled by a broadly socialist coalition, the *Front Populaire*, and was politically volatile. It had believed itself to be militarily strong, yet the country would be crushed by Nazi advances in May 1940, with almost every village losing men to PoW camps. Marshal Philippe Pétain was voted full powers to take stewardship of the ailing nation, and his negotiations with Hitler would see it divided into two main zones. It was decided that a new government in the town of Vichy would govern both, but whereas the northern and western zone was to be fully occupied, those living in the southern and eastern zone were to be left 'free' to administer themselves.

Oradour-sur-Glane, which fell within the free, unoccupied zone, was a *bourg* – a large central village that served a wider parish of hamlets and farms. In 1911, it had benefited from the installation of an electric tram line to Limoges, which enabled city-dwellers to swim or fish in the crystal waters of the Glane. Its country fairs and regular musical evenings and balls were always well

attended, and its hotels and restaurants well-respected. But with war came refugees, and defeat brought restrictions imposed by the Vichy regime. Music and theatre ground to a halt, partly due to Vichy orders, but mostly because resources had become stretched. With the coming of the new government there also came requisitions to support the German war effort.

France came under full German control in November 1942, when the Allies landed in north Africa and the Nazi regime tightened its stranglehold over its occupied territories. Although quality of life in Oradour-sur-Glane continued to suffer, it was easier to get fresh food than in the cities, and like any rural village, it remained a good place to lie low and avoid detection. As Allied bombs fell on urban areas, it also became a haven for town-based parents to send their children, especially if they already had relations there.

But the changing nature of the war meant a growth in opposition to the Vichy regime, which seemed to be aligning itself more and more with Hitler's Germany. A German drive to requisition French men to replace the workforce in the Reich led to a significant rise in people joining the rural Resistance movement, the *maquis*, with many others hiding out in the countryside. Known as *réfractaires* (recusants), there were several such men in Oradour by June 1944, as well as escaped prisoners of war. Compared to other villages, however, *maquis* activity remained low. Many locals continued to believe in Pétain, and city dwellers carried on visiting at weekends. Prior to the massacre, 10 June had been a busy day in the *bourg*.

But if the village was not a haven of Resistance, how and why did it become the subject of such an atrocity? It might be

The village's isolated nature marked it out as an easy target – and it was quickly earmarked for destruction



France's provisional leader and future president, Charles de Gaulle (centre), pays his respects to the victims of the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre in March 1945



The village's ruins have remained largely untouched since the massacre. After the Second World War, Charles de Gaulle was keen for the site to serve as a permanent reminder of the nation's martyrdom under Nazi occupation

argued that it was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Shortly after the D-Day landings of 6 June, the SS Panzer Division Das Reich received an order from German High Command, instructing it to carry out a "brutal and lasting strike" that would deter civilians from helping the Resistance. The division had recently returned from the eastern front, where such extreme violence had been commonplace, and it would continue its campaign of terror by hanging 99 *maquisards* in Tulle, some 70 miles south-east of Oradour-sur-Glane.

Whatever form the "brutal and lasting strike" was to take, it would need to be carried out quickly, and in a location that didn't hinder the division's progress to Normandy, where it was being sent to fight against the Allies. On 8 June, SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Lammerding had taken a train to Saint-Junien, nine miles south of Oradour, where *maquis* leaders had clashed with Wehrmacht soldiers after pre-emptively trying to 'liberate' the town following news of the Normandy landings. But it quickly became clear to Lammerding that Saint-Junien was not a suitable choice for the action. The area was too big to surround, and its *maquis* would likely fight back – the very thing he wished to avoid. Thus, the commander's attentions instead turned to Oradour. Its isolated nature and lack of Resistance marked it out as an easy target, and – with the assistance of Vichy paramilitaries – it was quickly earmarked for destruction.

False allegations

To aid the atrocity, misinformation was used even as the operation was being carried out. Most of the soldiers did not know why they were doing what they were doing, and had been given only patchy stories of Resistance in the village. Meanwhile, there were erroneous suggestions that a close friend of SS-Sturmbannführer Adolf Diekmann, Major Helmut Kämpfe, had been kidnapped by *maquisards* in the vicinity of the village, when he was actually

being held at a completely different location.

One story that began circulating straight away and continues to be cited to this day is that the 'wrong' Oradour had been chosen. According to this theory, Das Reich's intended target had been a larger village named Oradour-sur-Vayres, where the *maquis* had been active. However, this theory would have required a barely believable navigational error, given that Oradour-sur-Vayres was 25 miles to the south-west. The expert map-readers of the SS would never have made such a mistake.

By attempting to shift responsibility to the Resistance, the SS involved could claim the massacre had been a reprisal – just as they continued to do in the aftermath of the war. At their 1953 military tribunal, the surviving suspects closed ranks and claimed that the people of Oradour had been harbouring *maquisards* and weapons, and that various atrocities against German soldiers had been committed in or near the village – all allegations for which not a shred of evidence was found.

However, the truth would finally come out in 1983 when SS-Untersturmführer Heinz Barth became the first senior commander to face trial for the massacre. Standing in front of a judge in East Berlin, the veteran claimed he was surprised that a handful of people in the village had managed to escape. "I was quite shocked," he told the courtroom, quite impassively, "because we left on the principle that, as far as we knew, there were no survivors."

Barth admitted openly what was already known: that the decision had been made to wipe the village from the face of the Earth, regardless of who they found there. The problem for Das Reich was that there *had* been survivors, some of whom were present when Barth was handed a life sentence for his part in the destruction of Oradour-sur-Glane. **H**



SS commander Heinz Barth stood trial for his part in the massacre in 1983, having spent four decades evading justice under a false name. He was given a life sentence, but released on health grounds in 1997

Robert Pike is a PhD candidate at Cardiff University, studying the Resistance in occupied France. His books include *Silent Village: The Life and Death of Oradour-sur-Glane* (The History Press, 2021)



A BBC radio documentary about the massacre is available to stream online at bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p033wb5b



Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Is there any truth to the rumour that Benjamin Franklin was a serial killer?

»» The very idea is extraordinary and, of course, the answer is an emphatic 'no'. There were, though, human bones from 15 different individuals found buried in what had been the garden of his central London home between 1757 and 1762 and again between 1764 and 1772.

The bones were discovered in 1998 when work was being undertaken to enable the house to become the museum and education centre that is today's Benjamin Franklin House. The bones were 250 years old, dating from the time when Dr Franklin was still living in Craven Street, if not in the same house.

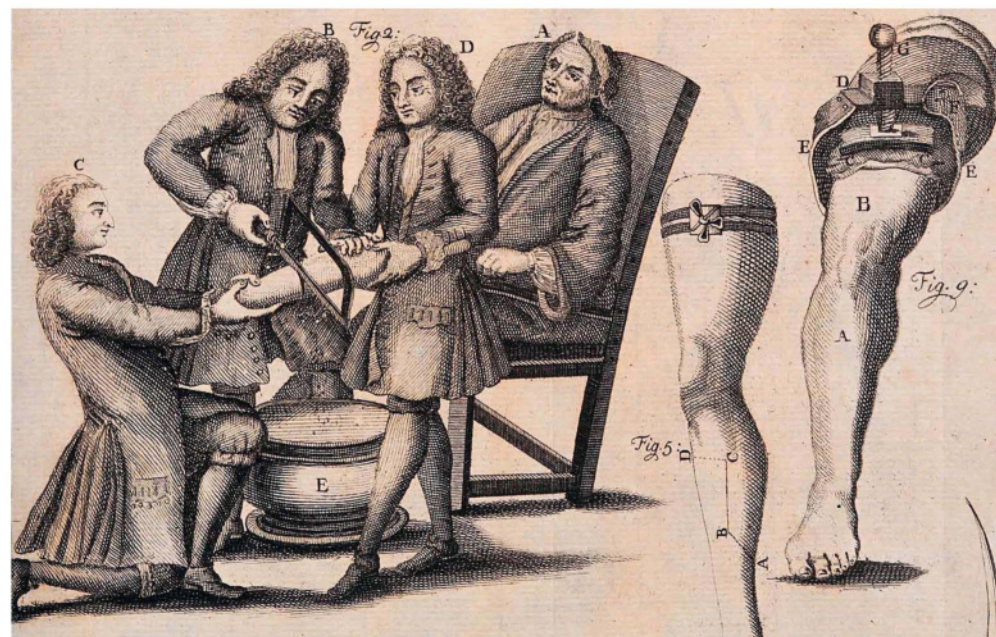
That said, he still had access to his old abode, because both houses belonged to his landlady Margaret Stevenson. She and her famous lodger had moved across the road to make way for her daughter, her son-in-law and young son, who was also Franklin's godson. It is the son-in-law and anatomist Dr William Hewson who was responsible for the bones – and he was not a serial killer either.

Hewson was one of the most brilliant medical scientists of the age and, like

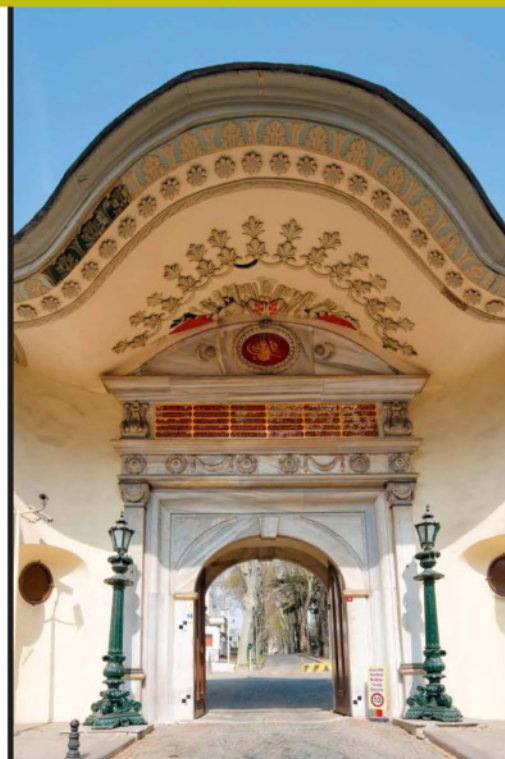
Franklin, he was the winner of the Royal Society's annual Copley Medal. After moving to Craven Street, Hewson gave well-attended practical lectures at the anatomy theatre he had built next to the house. For these he needed fresh cadavers, which presented him with a problem.

Up until the Anatomy Act of 1832, only the bodies of executed murderers were legally available for teaching and study and these went to the Company of Surgeons. However, in filthy and disease-ridden London, a city of 750,000 where the death rate was high, there was no shortage of new bodies that could be supplied by body snatchers, before or after burial. But the post-demonstration bones had to disappear, hence the use of the garden from 1772 until 1774, when it stopped for a tragic reason: Dr Hewson's knife slipped, he cut himself and sadly died of septicaemia.

.....
George Goodwin, author of *Benjamin Franklin in London* and author in residence at Benjamin Franklin House



An engraving from 1743 features diagrams illustrating how to amputate arms and legs. During the 18th century, the medical and scientific study of human anatomy flourished



What was the 'Sublime Porte'?

»» Associated with the Ottoman empire, the 'Sublime Porte' is a French term steeped in diplomatic history, symbolising the seat of imperial power in Constantinople (now known as Istanbul). The phrase traces its roots to the high gate (pictured above) of the Topkapı Palace, through which officials and emissaries obtained an audience with the sultan's court.

Before Mehmed II's capture of Constantinople from the Byzantine empire in 1453, it had been customary for imperial edicts to be proclaimed from the high gate. The city's new Ottoman rulers retained the practice.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, European diplomats employed the term as a metaphor for the Ottoman government. The allure of the Sublime Porte captivated the western imagination, reflecting perceptions of an exotic and mysterious Orient.

Despite Ottoman decline in the 19th century, the Sublime Porte's legacy endured as a historical emblem of Ottoman opulence and diplomatic protocol. Today, the term continues to evoke the splendour and intrigue of a bygone era in diplomacy and international relations.

.....
Danny Bird, staff writer for *BBC History Magazine*



Child survivors of Auschwitz show their tattooed arms, February 1945. Hundreds of thousands of inmates of the camp had registration numbers inked onto their skin

Was there really a tattooist at Auschwitz?

»»» There were a few. It was standard procedure in Auschwitz to identify those arriving prisoners selected for work by tattooing them with their camp registration number. The logic was that the corpses of dead prisoners had to be identifiable so that camp records could be maintained.

Initially, the SS had only tattooed Soviet prisoners of war, prisoners in the camp infirmary, and those who were to be executed. But the camp's expansion in 1942 saw the practice extended to all prisoners who were selected to work. Those that were killed upon arrival were not registered and so not tattooed.

At first, prisoners were tattooed on the left side of the chest, using spiked metal dies loaded into a wooden handle, which was punched into their skin. Ink would then be rubbed over the resulting wound, producing a crude tattoo.

In 1942, when tattooing became a routine part of the registration process, this method was considered impractical and a single-needle device was introduced, with which the serial-number could be tattooed onto the outside of the prisoner's left forearm.

Tattooing only took place at Auschwitz, and it was primarily Jews who were marked, though some Roma and non-Jewish Poles were also processed

in the same way. Some 400,000 registration numbers were issued.

Little is known about the tattooists, except that they were part of a small group of prisoners who worked for the SS in the registration office and could be called on at any time. Granted extra rations and bonus payments, they were spared some of the camp's worst horrors.

The character in Heather Morris's novel *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* – Lale Sokolov (formerly Ludwig Eisenberg) – was one of them. Though the book has been criticised for what's been perceived as a rather cavalier treatment of the wider subject matter, Eisenberg was a historical figure. A Slovakian Jew and locksmith by profession, he arrived in the camp in 1942 and was tattooed with the number 32407.

In 1943, after a bout of typhus, Eisenberg was engaged by the SS as a tattooist. Camp records show him working for the registration department at least up to the end of September 1944. He was evacuated from Auschwitz before the arrival of the Red Army in January 1945 and taken to Mauthausen, from where he escaped. He emigrated to Australia, and was interviewed by Morris shortly before his death in 2006.

.....
Roger Moorhouse, author and historian specialising in modern German history

DID YOU KNOW...?

Fuel fraud

In early 1940, a conman persuaded General Franco (below right), the Spanish dictator, that he could produce petrol by mixing water with a variety of plant extracts. Working in tandem with the general's chauffeur, who told his employer that his official car was already running on this extraordinary fuel, Albert von Filek fooled Spain's ruler into granting him land by a particular river on which to build a factory. When the scam was revealed, von Filek and his associate were both jailed.



English earthquake

More than a thousand buildings in Colchester and surrounding villages were destroyed in an earthquake on the morning of 22 April 1884. Estimated to have measured 4.6 on the Richter Scale, the quake lasted only a matter of seconds but damaged houses, shops and churches. One church in Colchester lost its spire which crashed to the ground. Fissures, yards long, opened up in some roads. Despite the chaos, there were no recorded deaths.

Priceless expenses

The astronaut Buzz Aldrin submitted an expenses claim for his trip to the moon. Aldrin, the second man to step onto Earth's satellite after Neil Armstrong, filled out a form to request \$33.31 in expenses for his travel from his Texas home to the moon and back. On their return to Earth, Aldrin and his fellow astronauts on the historic Apollo 11 mission also had to sign customs forms declaring that they had brought back 'moon rocks' and 'moon dust'.

.....
Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



A display of rocks brought back from the moon in 1969

WHY DO WE SAY...

...it's raining cats and dogs?

» As is well-known, it never rains cats and dogs. Therefore, people keep wondering where the odd phrase came from. It surfaced in print in the middle of the 17th century, and the hypotheses of its origin are numerous. Some of them pretend to explain only the reference to cats and have no value by definition. Others are pure fancy. Such as the idea that torrential rains used to carry along with them the refuse of the streets, including many dead animals. Somebody who has never read Scandinavian myths suggested that in northern mythology cats are said to be influenced by the coming storm and that the weather god Odin's animals were hounds. But Old Norse cats had nothing to do with rain, while Odin was not a weather god and never owned dogs.

Yet a sensible explanation of the idiom seems to exist. The phrase "it

rained cats and dogs and pitchforks" has been recorded. Also, in 1592 a reliable author wrote: "Instead of thunderbolts shooteth nothing but dogboltes and catboltes." The words 'dogboltes' and 'catboltes', denoting 'iron bars', are still current in dialects. The original idea was that a downpour of sharp objects fell to the ground.

Perhaps this is how our current idiom originated, with speakers shortening catboltes and dogboltes to cats and dogs. *Perhaps* is a necessary caveat. In etymology, regardless of whether we deal with a word or a phrase, few solutions are final.



Anatoly Liberman, professor and author of *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

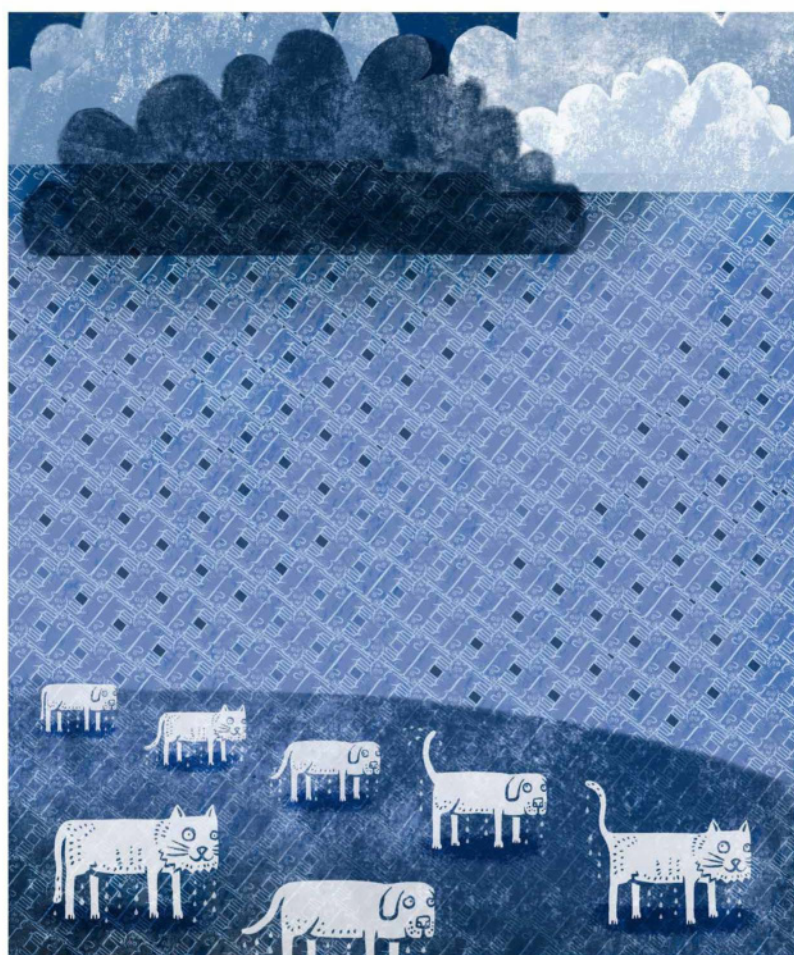


ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN MCBETH



A detail with hieroglyphics from the coffin of Nespareshet (c990-940 BC), who was chief scribe of the Temple of Amun

When were the last hieroglyphs written?

» The last known hieroglyphs were carved on "the birthday of Osiris, his dedication feast, year 110" – 24 August AD 394 – at the temple complex at Philae in southern Egypt.

This had been an important religious centre for well over 600 years, particularly for the cult of Osiris. This inscription, however, was carved by a priest named Nesmeterakhem (or Esmet-Akhom) next to a depiction of the god Mandulis as a human-headed falcon. There is also an accompanying text in Demotic script, a simpler form of cursive writing which evolved from hieroglyphs.

By 394 hieroglyphics were near extinction, the preserve of a diminishing priestly class. It's probably significant that Philae was outside the Roman empire, where Christianity was becoming the dominant religion. Emperor Theodosius I was a Christian who supposedly ordered the closure of pagan temples in Egypt, but Philae was beyond his grasp.

Eugene Byrne, author, journalist and historian of the British Isles



British gentlemen savour the cultural treasures of Rome in this c1750 painting by Scottish artist Katherine Read

What was the Grand Tour?

»» In the late 16th century, young aristocrats began embarking on what would become an educational and cultural rite of passage, the Grand Tour. It epitomised a desire to supplement a classical education with the art and culture of Europe.

With its name coined by Richard Lassels in his 1670 book *The Voyage of Italy*, the Grand Tour reached its zenith in the 18th century. Typically undertaken by affluent young men, it involved extensive travel across Europe, usually for around a year.

Italy was a key destination, with visitors flocking to cities full of art, including Venice, Florence and Rome. Accompanied by tutors,

travellers embarked on a rigorous itinerary, exploring landmarks, attending cultural events and indulging in leisure activities.

The Grand Tour influenced not only architectural styles – Inigo Jones’s work, for instance, was shaped by his trip to Italy – but also artistic endeavours, inspiring the establishment of UK institutions like the Royal Academy of Arts by Joshua Reynolds.

The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars interrupted the tradition, only for it to be revived after Napoleon’s defeat in 1815. However, by the mid-19th century, the advent of rail travel democratised tourism, marking the end of the Grand Tour. **DB**

Why was Norman Wisdom beloved of Albanians?

»» Norman Wisdom’s popularity in Albania emerged from an unlikely source: the country’s international isolation under Enver Hoxha’s Stalinist regime. During the 1960s, Albania’s state-run media broadcast a limited selection of foreign films, among which were several featuring Wisdom’s comic antics.

His slapstick humour and portrayal of the downtrodden underdog resonated deeply with Albanians, who saw parallels between his on-screen struggles and their own everyday experiences in the hermetic society.

Wisdom’s films, particularly *The Early Bird* and *A Stitch in Time*, became hugely popular, earning him the endearing

nickname ‘Pitkin’ among Albanians. His character’s resilience in the face of adversity resonated with the regime’s ideology, which regarded Wisdom as a proletarian foil to the bourgeoisie.

Even after Hoxha’s death in 1985 and the fall of his regime, Norman Wisdom’s popularity endured in Albania. His films continued to be cherished classics, passed down through generations. The comedian first visited the country in 1995 and was made an honorary citizen of the capital, Tirana. And when Wisdom died aged 95 in 2010, the Albanian prime minister led the tributes. **DB**



A British poster for *A Stitch in Time*, a 1963 film starring Norman Wisdom that became a popular hit in Albania

Gulbadan Begum

The Mughal Jane Austen

Gulbadan Begum was meant to live a quiet life in the confines of a Mughal harem. Instead she made her mark on history twice: first, embarking on a pioneering pilgrimage to Islam's holy cities; second, writing a remarkable history of her dynasty. **RUBY LAL** tells her story

It all began in early 1576. Princess Gulbadan Begum sat opposite her nephew, the Mughal emperor Akbar, waiting for her turn to speak. The princess was of medium height, with distinctive straight eyebrows over penetrating eyes. She was dressed in a flowing long top over loose trousers, her chest covered with a stole thrown casually over her shoulders and head. Ruby and pearl necklaces adorned her neck.

Gulbadan dressed and carried herself like a woman of great standing. And why shouldn't she? She was, after all, the daughter of Babur, the revered warrior-king who had conquered Delhi in 1526 and in doing so laid the foundations for the Mughal empire. Bearing the wisdom of the decades she had spent on the move across Afghanistan and India, Gulbadan was now a key matriarch in Akbar's harem. As for the emperor, he was fully cognisant of her status as a powerful elder. But he hadn't granted his aunt an audience just to pay his respects to her. Gulbadan had asked for the meeting without revealing the topic.

And when Gulbadan began to speak, she presented something even Akbar couldn't fathom. She wished to embark on a journey across the seas to the Muslim holy cities, she informed him. That way – through the act of pilgrimage – she would fulfil her pledge to God.

What Gulbadan was proposing was extraordinary. The harem where Gulbadan and other women of the Mughal court were living was fundamental to Akbar's plan to broadcast his image as an invincible sovereign. Since ascending the Mughal throne in 1556, Akbar had extended Babur's realm through a mixture of war and canny diplomacy. Now he was determined to have all of India at his feet. Decreeing that all women attached to the Mughal dynasty must move into their designated harem apartments in the new capital of Fatehpur Sikri was central to that design. No more wandering the lands as his forefa-

thers and their women had done. The women were now to be fully settled, mysterious and invisible. This was how Akbar advertised the grandeur and awe of his glory.

What Gulbadan was requesting of the emperor therefore represented a complete reversal of policy. Yet instead of dismissing her out of hand, Akbar listened to his aunt's proposal. He knew she was enormously powerful. As ambassadors, peacemakers and councillors, elder women were key to the political affairs of the empire. It would serve the emperor's interests if he had Gulbadan on his side.

Although the aunt and the nephew sat talking about the hajj (pilgrimage), in fact they each had a different predicament. Gulbadan was a vagabond princess. Adventure was at the core of her being. She was born into a long line of itinerant rulers that went all the way back to Genghis Khan, and had not always lived in palaces. In fact, for most of her life, she had resided, often happily, in tents, citadels and gardens.

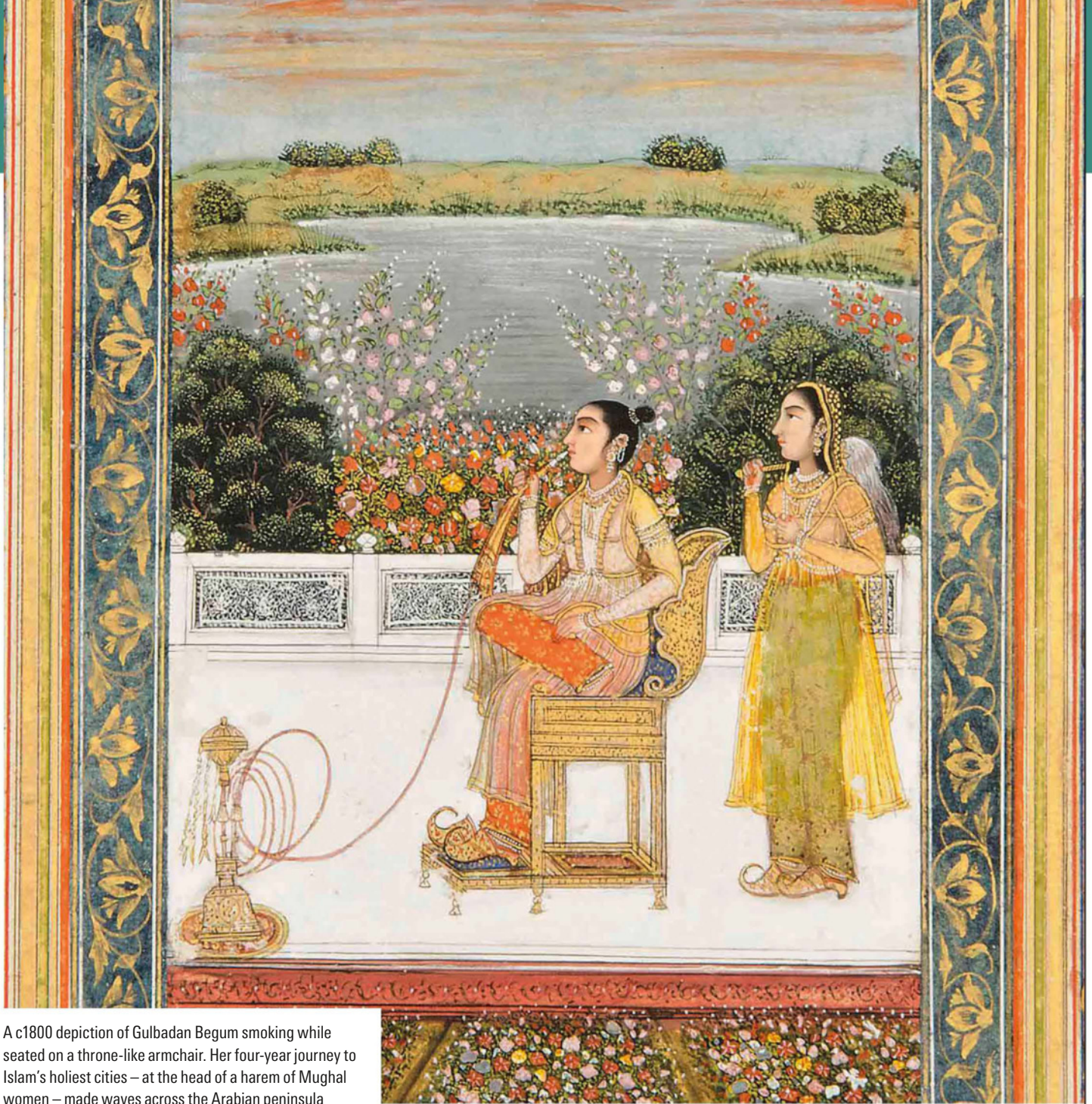
Gulbadan's travels had begun at the age of six when Babur had decreed that all Mughal women and children in his stronghold of Kabul were to migrate to Hindustan to cultivate deeper relations in the areas that he had conquered in 1526. And so Gulbadan became the first Mughal girl to travel in a caravan across the Khyber Pass and the massive Indus river en route to being reunited with her father. With migration came a new land, new languages, new relationships, many points of view. Movement was part of her universe, and now she sought a new adventure.

The sacred cosmos

Gulbadan knew that, although the majority of pilgrims were devout, the hajj was not just about piety. Trade, politics and religion intertwined in the holy city of Mecca, a mercantile republic on the Red Sea. Seekers and mystics travelled there simply to absorb the aura of the desert land where many prophets were given revelations. Sojourners, or mujawirs, spent years learning, wandering and living in the sacred Arabian cosmos. Scholars went to gain expertise in the traditions (hadith) of the life and times of Prophet Muhammad in some of the finest schools in the holy cities.

Akbar, meanwhile, had dreams of being the head of the Islamic world. As a godlike king, he would be the final

“As ambassadors and peacemakers, elder women like Gulbadan were key to the political affairs of the Mughal empire”



A c1800 depiction of Gulbadan Begum smoking while seated on a throne-like armchair. Her four-year journey to Islam's holiest cities – at the head of a harem of Mughal women – made waves across the Arabian peninsula

arbiter of law, gaining utmost power within the framework of Islam to prevent any further challenge to his authority. To achieve this, he needed the support of women like Gulbadan.

And so, when Gulbadan proposed the hajj, Akbar accepted the idea, even though the difficulties of navigating the waters to the holy cities nestled upon the Red Sea were mammoth. Pirates regularly attacked pilgrim ships. He'd have to negotiate with the Portuguese, who controlled the sea lanes to western Arabia, and acquire the cartaz, a mandatory travel pass.

Once she had Akbar's consent, Gulbadan began to work on the details of her journey. Her party would consist of 11 close female relatives and associates as well as reliable servants. The court leader of the hajj and three other men were to accompany the convoy, along with a Turkish artillery officer (who would serve as an interpreter), and scores of soldiers, attendants, cooks and other staff.

And so, at the ripe age of 52, Gulbadan led a group of harem women across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Gulbadan was away for four years and performed the rites of pilgrimage on four occasions. According to the court historian Abd-al Qadir Badayuni, her party even travelled overland to the holy cities of Iran, such as Mashhad.

This was the first time that a large party of Mughal women had undertaken the pilgrimage – and it wasn't long before their presence in the holy cities was causing a stir. Contemporary reports suggest that crowds jostled to catch a glimpse of the women around mosques, fountains and markets. Their practice of giving alms to the poor only increased their celebrity.

Yet not everyone was impressed by the women's generosity. Ottoman sultan Murad III viewed this Mughal party's incursion into his territory as a threat; he simply



The brilliance of Babur Find out why Margaret MacMillan believes the first Mughal emperor deserves greater recognition at: historyextra.com/babur-pod



A depiction of the celebrations marking the circumcision of the future Mughal emperor Akbar I. In the late 1580s, Akbar commissioned Gulbadan (who, Ruby Lal has established, is almost certainly the woman holding the red book, top right) to contribute to the first official history of the Mughal empire

could not allow a group of women to violate his authority through their munificence. And so he declared their presence indecorous, accused them of creating 'fitna' (chaos), and ordered their eviction from the holy place.

There was not a word from Akbar in response to Murad's charges, even though the Red Sea and the Indian coast were closely knit and in constant contact. And so Gulbadan was forced to return home.

Five years after her return, Gulbadan began another astonishing journey, this time from behind the parapets of the harem in Mughal Lahore. Around 1587, Akbar made an announcement that would transform the idea of

record-keeping in Mughal history. He commissioned the first official history of his empire and asked esteemed servants and state officers, all male, to record their memories as a source for his grand work. Akbar also approached one venerable woman: his accomplished Aunt Gulbadan, now aged 63.

What Gulbadan delivered was no simple memoir of an elderly lady. She penned in exceptional detail the ragged

and robust lives of the people of her dynasty – ambitious men, subversive women, brilliant eunuchs and devoted nurses – and, in doing so, became the first woman to write a prose chronicle in the Islamic world. As an author, she was a pioneer – a Jane Austen for her times – committed to recording Mughal daily life, women's point of view, the places where they lived, what they thought, said and did.

Housed today in the British Library, the lone surviving copy of Gulbadan's memoir cuts off abruptly mid-sentence. The final portion of it has vanished. Where are the remaining pages? Why is there just one copy of this book when it was the Mughal tradition to create several copies of all important works?

The fate of the final section of Gulbadan's extraordinary memoir is shrouded in mystery. Yet, 500 years after she walked the Mughal world, nothing can hide the brilliance of its brave, audacious and adventurous author. **H**

// Gulbadan penned in exceptional detail the ragged and robust lives of the people of her dynasty //

Ruby Lal is an award-winning historian of India and professor of south Asian history at Emory University. Her latest book, *Vagabond Princess: The Great Adventures of Gulbadan*, was published by Yale in February



To listen to Greg Jenner and guests discuss the Mughal empire on **You're Dead to Me**, go to bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p088jy8d

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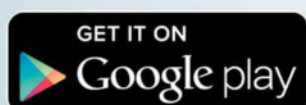
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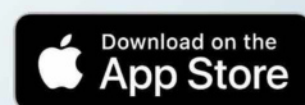
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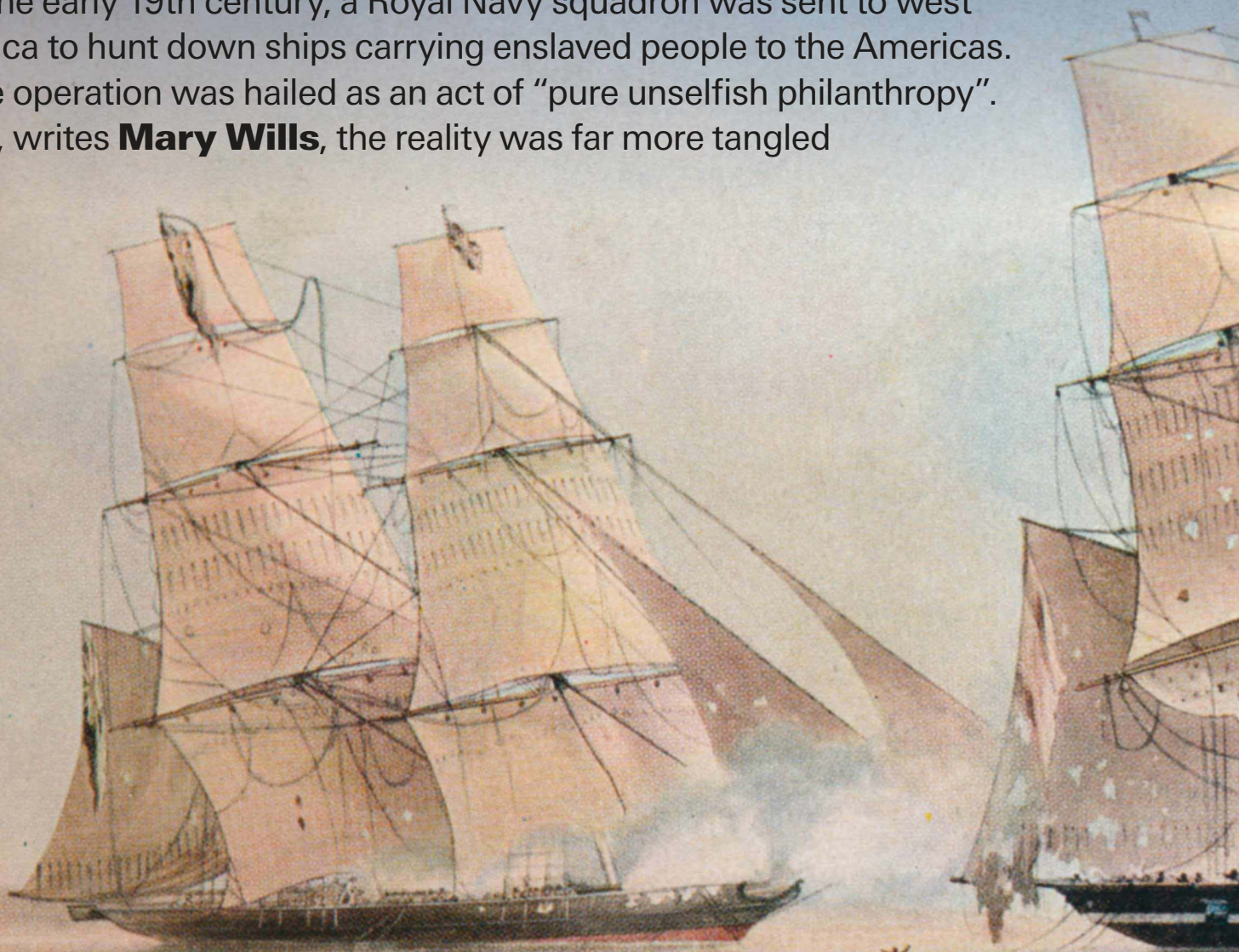


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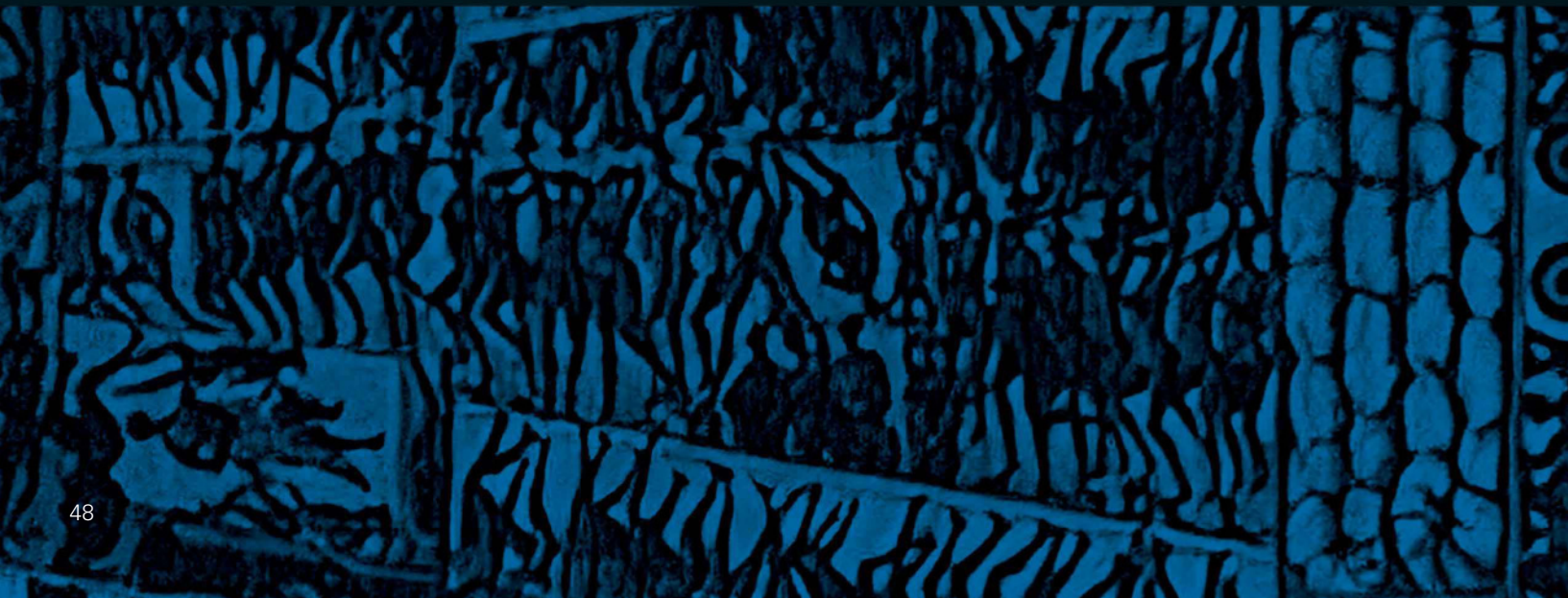


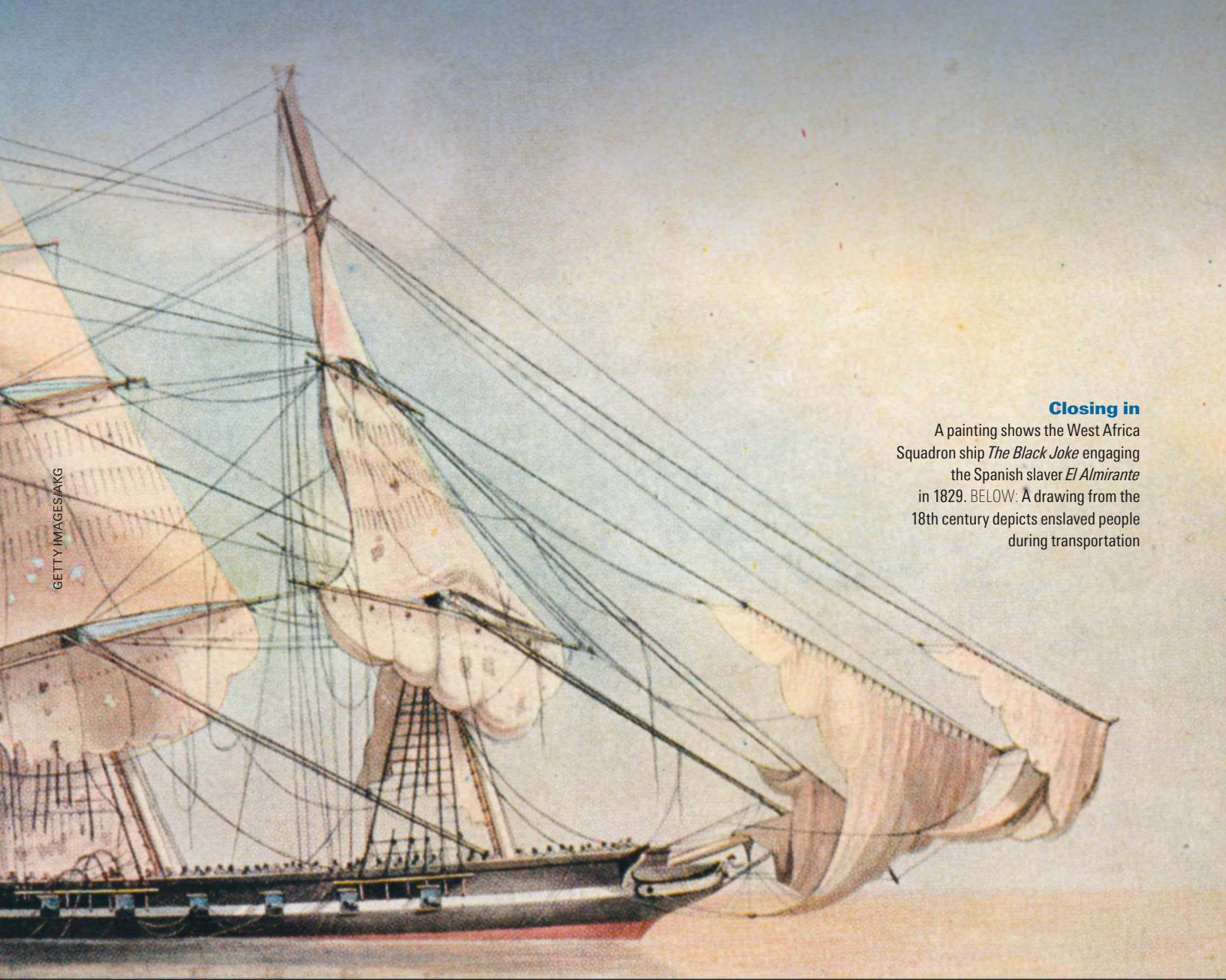
BBC **HiSTORY** MAGAZINE

In the early 19th century, a Royal Navy squadron was sent to west Africa to hunt down ships carrying enslaved people to the Americas. The operation was hailed as an act of “pure unselfish philanthropy”. Yet, writes **Mary Wills**, the reality was far more tangled



Britain's war on





GETTY IMAGES/ALG

Closing in

A painting shows the West Africa Squadron ship *The Black Joke* engaging the Spanish slaver *El Almirante* in 1829. BELOW: A drawing from the 18th century depicts enslaved people during transportation

the slave ships



In March 1821, the Royal Navy vessel *Tartar* exchanged fire with a Spanish ship, *Anna Maria*. Such a tussle was not unusual in this period of British naval supremacy, fewer than 20 years after victory at the battle of Trafalgar. Yet this was an intervention in a very different kind of war, unlike anything British naval personnel had previously encountered. For *Anna Maria* was a slave vessel, with more than 400 enslaved African men, women and children crowded on board.

The *Anna Maria* had just embarked from the river Bonny in what is now Nigeria; its human cargo intended for forcible transportation to the Americas' plantations. In a report to the Admiralty, the *Tartar's* captain, Commodore Sir George Ralph Collier, a veteran of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, struggled to put into words the human suffering he had witnessed on boarding such slave vessels. "No description I could give would convey a true picture of its baseness and atrocity," he reported.

This was neither the first nor the last time that Collier would witness such horrors, for he belonged to the West Africa Squadron, a detachment of Royal Navy vessels formed to enforce the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, passed by Britain's parliament in 1807. From its formal establishment in 1818 to its disbandment in the 1860s, the squadron pursued and captured around 1,500 slaving ships along 2,000 miles of west African coastline – all with the aim of suppressing the prolific trade in human lives prosecuted by other nations.

It was an endeavour that set London at loggerheads with a number of rival powers and saw its sailors engaged in a series of cat-and-mouse battles with the slavers. What's more, it's an episode that shines a light on Britain's view of its place in the world in the first half of the 19th century.

The dominant force

That British sailors were hunting slaving ships at all in the 1820s is remarkable, given their nation's deep and enduring links with transatlantic slavery. Just a few decades earlier, at the end of the 18th century, Britain was arguably the dominant force in a trade that, over four centuries, had led to an estimated 12–15 million African people being forcibly shipped across the Atlantic by European nations.

All that changed in 1807 when – in the face of a rising tide of campaigning, petition-

ing and boycotts that saw the abolitionist cause build an unstoppable momentum – it became illegal for any British ship or subject to trade in enslaved people. A nation that had for so long condemned vast numbers of people to unimaginable horrors now set about signalling its commitment to the principles of abolitionism, humanity and philanthropy. And one of the ways in which it sought to do so was by intercepting and detaining slave vessels.

The passing of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was a landmark moment in British history, but it hardly brought enslaved people's suffering to an end. For a start, until 1834 (when Britain outlawed the owning, buying and selling of humans as property throughout its colonies around the world) nearly three-quarters of a million people remained enslaved across the Caribbean.

And then, of course, there were the other slaving nations. Denmark (1792) and the United States (1808) moved early, abolishing the trade before or just after Britain. But it would be 1836 before the Dutch, French, Spanish, Brazilian and Portuguese governments had all followed suit. Even beyond this

date, illegal trading flourished, largely driven by the booming demand for enslaved labourers from the sugar and coffee plantations of Cuba and Brazil.

This was the environment in which the West Africa Squadron embarked upon its first mission in the early 19th century. Its crew may have represented the world's most powerful maritime nation – one fired up by a newfound humanitarian zeal – yet, in reality, these sailors were severely under-resourced. Their numbers were bolstered by Kru sailors, West African seamen from present-day Liberia. Dozens served on every British vessel, assisting with navigation, interpreting, or transporting men between ship and shore.

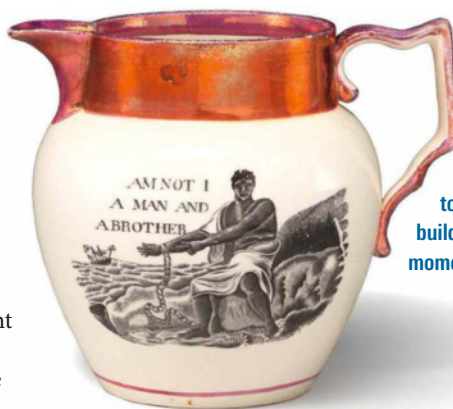
At its height, in the 1840s, the squadron had a fleet of just 27 vessels to call upon. These were, for the most part, slower and less agile than the ships they were tasked with seizing. In fact, so rapid were the slavers' vessels that the Royal Navy deployed former slave ships to counter them. *The Black Joke* (formerly the slave ship *Henriqueta*, detained in 1827) was renowned for its success in tracking and capturing its quarry.

Soon slave-ship captains were developing ever more canny tactics to escape detection – and in response, the Admiralty started pursuing increasingly coercive strategies. This included blockades of established slave trading ports and rivers, and the bombardment of coastal settlements where merchants prepared enslaved Africans for embarkation in buildings called 'barracoons'. One attack along the river Gallinas in Sierra Leone in 1845 destroyed a number of villages, enraging the locals and calling the squadron's 'humanitarian' motives into question.

Prize voyage

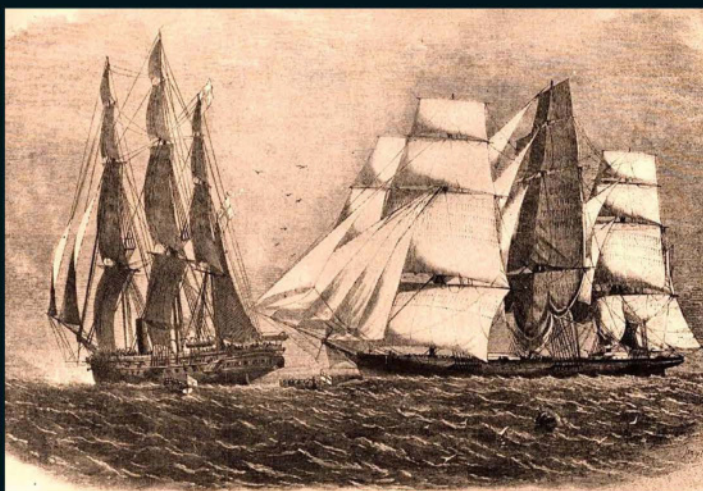
The squadron patrolled the seas under nascent international treaties which enabled the Royal Navy to intercept slaving vessels of other nations. Once they had captured a slave ship, British sailors would undertake the 'prize voyage'. This would see the intercepted vessel being transported to Sierra Leone on the west African coast (see box, page 55), a journey that could take weeks. If the capture was declared legal, a financial reward, 'prize money', was distributed among the crew for the condemned vessel and its property (which in this context included the captive Africans).

Some ships were empty when captured, but many were horrendously overcrowded, with 300 or 400 enslaved people crammed onto one vessel. First-hand testimonies of these harrowing voyages are rare. "My wretchedness I cannot describe," reported the formerly enslaved Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua of his experiences. "Nothing can exceed the horrors of those slave vessels,"



An abolitionist jug from c1820. The turn of the 19th century had seen the campaign to end the slave trade build up an unstoppable momentum

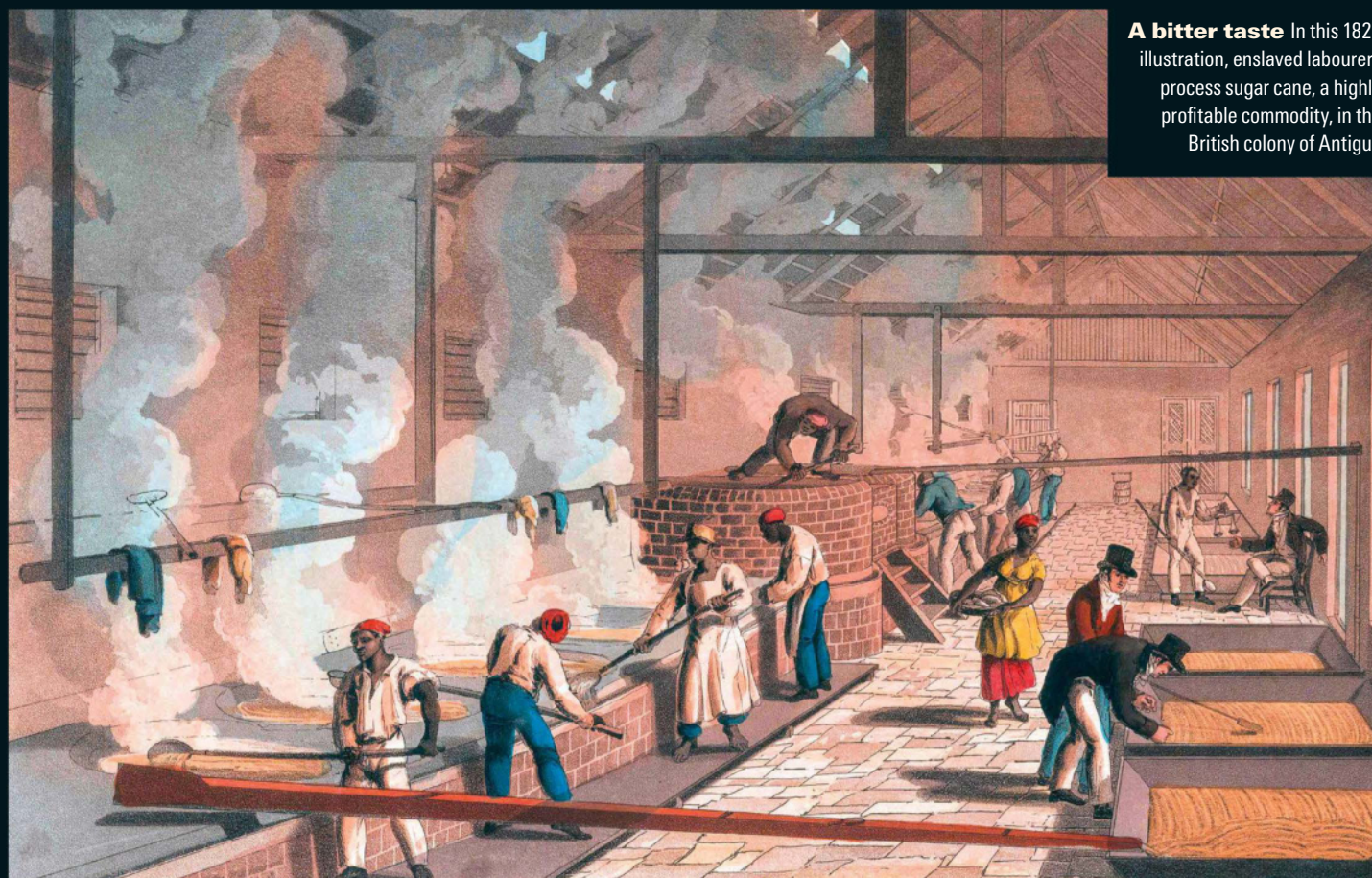
Britain now set about signalling its commitment to the principles of abolitionism and philanthropy



Against the odds HMS *Brisk* captures the slave ship *Emanuela*. Despite such successes, the West Africa Squadron found that the vessels they were tasked with hunting were often faster than their own

Horror stories

A portrait of Sir George Ralph Collier, commodore of the West Africa Squadron. This veteran of the Napoleonic Wars was haunted by what he witnessed on captured slave ships

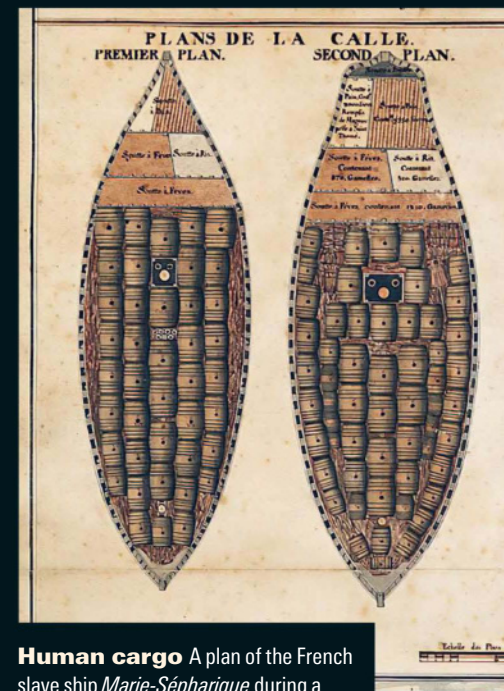


A bitter taste In this 1823 illustration, enslaved labourers process sugar cane, a highly profitable commodity, in the British colony of Antigua



Continuing confinement

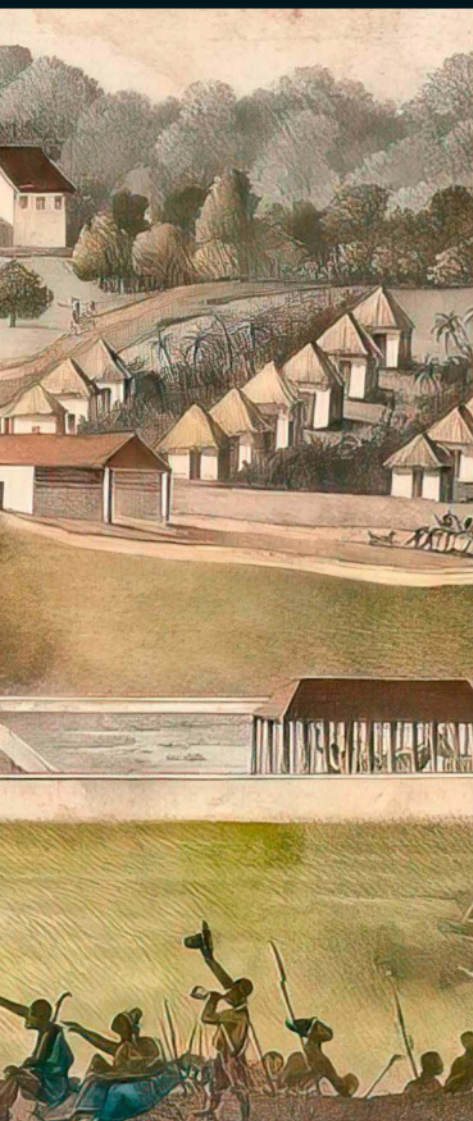
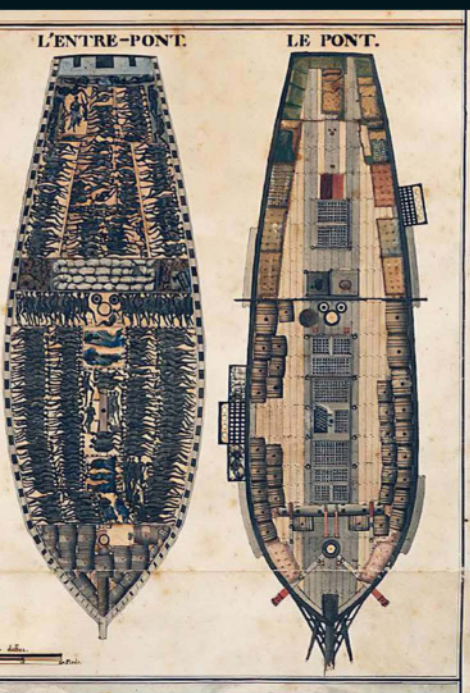
A watercolour shows recaptive Africans on the Royal Navy ship *The Albatross*, in 1845. "We found ourselves in the hands of new conquerors," wrote one recaptive of his experiences of the West Africa Squadron



Human cargo A plan of the French slave ship *Marie-Séraphique* during a transatlantic crossing in 1769-70. Hundreds of enslaved Africans are on board (second right) shackled together in horrendous conditions

Fighting back A lithograph shows the destruction of the Roehampton estate in Jamaica in 1832 during an uprising of the enslaved. Resistance helped hasten the end of slavery in the British Caribbean





ALAMY/AGG-IMAGES



How the battle to ban slavery divided Britain

Suzanne Schwarz answers your questions about the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade: [historyextra.com/abolition-everything-pod](https://www.historyextra.com/abolition-everything-pod)



confessed Admiral Robert Wauchope in his memoirs. These are mere snapshots but they shine a light on the misery that enslaved people endured on the 'Middle Passage' across the Atlantic.

Such conditions were not easily alleviated on prize voyages. Although no longer under the authority of a slave-ship crew, African captives still suffered from overcrowding, dehydration, poor ventilation and disease. Dysentery, smallpox and eye diseases were rife. "I certainly never beheld such a scene of complicated misery as our prize presents this morning," wrote one officer in 1841 about a Portuguese prize brig that had 392 enslaved people on board. "I dread sending away an officer and men in such a floating pest house!"

Such appalling conditions contributed to tensions between sailors and captive Africans. The account of Samuel Ajayi Crowther – released from a Portuguese slave vessel before going on to become a missionary, and the first Anglican African bishop – reveals the distrust inherent in encounters with European sailors. "We found ourselves in the hands of new conquerors", he wrote, "whom we at first very much dreaded, they being armed with long swords."

While there are many accounts of compassion in sailors' narratives, there is also evidence of naval men asserting control in ways reminiscent of the trade they were trying to suppress. Lieutenant James Stoddart wrote that while he was in charge of the prize vessels *Josephine* and *Veloz* in 1836, "cats [cat o' nine tails whips] had to be used freely".

Virulent diseases

Given the miseries they witnessed, the alien environment in which they plied their trade, and the fact that they often felt they were operating with one hand tied behind their backs, it's hardly surprising that the West Africa Squadron had an infamous reputation and morale was poor. Climatic extremes on the west African coast included searing heat and violent tropical storms. Virulent diseases such as yellow fever and malaria were a constant concern.

The climate, poor sanitation and lack of immunity to disease contributed to a significantly higher mortality rate than on other naval stations in this period. In September 1845, the *Éclair* arrived back in Britain with around two-thirds of the original crew (more than 70 officers and men) dead or dying. As for Sierra Leone, it was considered so unhealthy it was nicknamed 'the white man's grave'. After serving there for two years or more, many became, in the words of one naval officer, "heartily disgusted" with the service.

Sailors weren't alone in harbouring doubts about the West Africa Squadron. Britain claimed to be a champion of international justice, yet the squadron's activities proved highly controversial on the global stage, raising issues of the rights of one nation to intervene in the activities of another.

The squadron also enjoyed a mixed reception in Britain. While the *Black Joke's* feats were celebrated in paintings and reproduced in newspapers, MPs used parliamentary debates to lambast the squadron's spiralling cost and perceived lack of results.

Was the criticism justified? This was an unquestionably ambitious and valiant operation. The 1,500 vessels that it captured represented an estimated 6–10 per cent of slaving vessels, and around 200,000 African people released. That's a significant number, but a relatively small share of the estimated 3.2 million men, women and children who embarked as slaves between 1808 and 1863.

Critics of the squadron could also point out that 5,000 British sailors lost their lives during the campaign off west Africa, along with a significant number of recaptives, mostly through disease. And though the transatlantic slave trade was largely extinguished by the late 1860s, this was arguably more the result of internal political changes within slave-trading nations than acts of suppression on the high seas.

Yet, for all that, the work of the West Africa Squadron was undeniably the first chapter in a long history of British naval campaigns directed against international slavery, including in the Indian Ocean from the 1860s, in the Red Sea from the 1880s, and the Persian Gulf from the 1920s. It encouraged other nations to adopt anti-slavery laws and prompted the navies of the United States and France to engage in their own suppression efforts.

The extensive military commitment made by the British to anti-slave-trade operations

The *Éclair* arrived back in Britain with around two-thirds of the original crew dead or dying



Recaptured This 1838 sketch by Lt Henry Samuel Hawker shows Portuguese slaver *Diligente* being captured by HMS *Pearl* with 600 enslaved people on board



British abolitionism was motivated by humanitarian zeal but could also shade into cultural arrogance

Enduring captivity

Enslaved people pictured in Cuba in c1860. The demand from the island's sugar plantations saw thousands of Africans transported across the Atlantic long after most nations had abolished their slave trades

is, therefore, rightfully commended. But it certainly wasn't the act of "pure unselfish philanthropy" acclaimed by the naval historian CD Yonge in 1863. The picture is inevitably far more nuanced.

Ultimately, the same is true of the wider picture of British abolitionism in its varied forms in the early to mid-19th century. While such abolitionism was the product of a genuine humanitarianism, it also shaded into cultural arrogance – one that would produce a 'civilising' effort to encourage the end of slave trading in African societies and the conversion of African people to European forms of religion and government. As Commander Arthur Parry Eardley-Wilmot wrote in a defence of the West Africa Squadron in 1853: "If Africa is ever to be free and happy, England must be the apostle of that freedom." The British believed they alone could save non-Europeans from slavery, and that attitude would inform policies towards British colonial possessions into the second half of the 19th century and beyond.

One man who wouldn't live to see these policies implemented was George Collier. The commodore's understanding of his professional duty was imbued with a personal, moral responsibility to release the enslaved; his actions against slavers were performed with "no view to personal merit, for I did what humanity, and therefore my duty, only required".

In 1824, three years after leaving the squadron, Collier took his own life. At the inquest into his death, he was described as a "zealous and gallant officer". A naval officer quoted in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* asserted that his "services on the coast of Guinea could not but prove injurious to a mind more than commonly sensitive".

Collier's fate is a sad footnote in a story of politics, principle, philanthropy and national identity – and of a flawed mission affecting human lives. The tale of the West Africa Squadron is one of servicemen often acting bravely with moral and religious imperative to end the transatlantic slave trade, but who endured hardship and disease in the name of abolition. And, of course, it's also the story of formerly enslaved African people, who were seen to personify the victory of a humanitarian crusade, yet who still found themselves dominated by other forms of control. **H**

Mary Wills is a senior curator at British Online Archives. Her books include *Envoys of Abolition: British Naval Officers and the Campaign Against the Slave Trade in West Africa* (Liverpool University Press, 2019)

FROM HELL TO FREEDOM?

The capture of a slave ship was the first step of a journey that rarely took enslaved people back to their homelands

The seizure of a slaving vessel was a cause for celebration for the West Africa Squadron. But what fate awaited the enslaved Africans crammed aboard these ships?

The British crown colony of Sierra Leone was often the first destination for those released from the hellish grip of the slavers. British abolitionists had founded the colony in the 1780s as part of their 'civilising' mission – and its capital, Freetown, was the administrative centre of anti-slave trade operations. It was here that captured vessels were often adjudicated by British maritime courts.

Once in British hands, the enslaved people were condemned as part of the ship's property, registered and declared legally 'free'. They were now referred to as 'liberated Africans'. However, this was a version of liberty that many people would struggle to recognise today. As they remained subject to another nation's will, the terms 'recaptives' or 'recaptured Africans' are now understood to better describe their situation.

Few of the enslaved people could expect to see their homelands again. Rather than being repatriated, many were expected to build new lives in villages in and around Freetown.

Some, such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther (inset), were educated by the Church Missionary Society. Crowther made an extraordinary success of his post-enslavement life, going on to become the first African Anglican bishop.

Others were enlisted into the armed forces or employed on naval vessels. James 'Kaweli' Covey joined the crew of HMS *Buzzard* in 1838, and acted as interpreter during legal proceedings following a revolt aboard the slave ship *La Amistad* in 1839.

Thousands more were subjected to years of indentureship working in private households, in a system known as 'apprenticeship'. This practice was brought

to an end in 1847 after facing fierce criticism back in Britain.

The West Africa Squadron had sought to prevent Africans from being transported to the Americas. Yet, from the 1840s, the Caribbean was the destination for thousands of recaptives recruited to work in the sugar plantations of the British West Indies. This scheme was introduced in the wake of the Emancipation Act of 1834 in a bid to replace enslaved people with 'free' labour. Yet, as Captain Joseph Denman, a commander with the West Africa Squadron, observed, it was seen to "perpetuate their slavery".



An 1874 engraving of Freetown, Sierra Leone, which was the hub of Britain's anti-slavery operations



FIVE THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT...

Roman Britain

Rob Collins, who is teaching our new HistoryExtra Academy course, shares five surprising facts about life in Britain during the Roman occupation

1 Roman Britain was more than just one province

After the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43, Britain was named a province and given its first governor, Aulus Plautius. However, Septimius Severus, or possibly his son Caracalla, split the province of Britannia into two by AD 213: Britannia Superior and Britannia Inferior. Later, under Diocletian (reigned 284–305) or Constantine (reigned 306–337), Britannia was made a diocese consisting of four provinces: Maxima Caesariensis (south-east England); Flavia Caesariensis (eastern England and the Midlands); Britannia Prima (Wales and south-west England); and Britannia Secunda (northern England). Each time a new province was named, it was given a governor and staff to manage its affairs on behalf of the emperor.



A map from 1878 showing the four provinces of fourth-century Britain. Modern scholars debate the locations and borders of these provinces



A gilt bronze head of the goddess Sulis, found in Bath and thought to date from the first century AD

2 It's only thanks to the Romans that we know the names of native gods

Religion did not mix with literacy in Iron Age Britain, so it is only thanks to the spread of Roman religious practices, in which the names of gods and goddesses were inscribed on altars, that we actually know the names of any native British deities. It can be challenging to identify these gods with any certainty, but there are a number who only seem to have been recorded and worshipped in Britain.

Perhaps the most famous is Sulis, worshipped and commemorated along with Minerva at the huge bathing complex in modern Bath, but there are others. Antenociticus,

sometimes called 'the Geordie god', is known mostly from a few inscriptions at a temple outside the Hadrian's Wall fort of Benwell, west of Newcastle.

Other native gods that were worshipped along the wall included Coventina, who was commemorated at her sacred well-shrine at Carrawburgh, and a warrior or hunter god named Cocidius, who was worshipped widely by soldiers along the wall and across north-west England, with his cult centred on Bewcastle.

A possible local god of the Cambridgeshire area, Abandinus, is only known from a single votive object.



The silver in these ingots, which were used to pay soldiers, could have been mined here in Britain

3 The Romans mined gold, silver and other metals in Britain

Britain was known to contain copious metallic ores that were prized for metalworking across the Roman empire. The value of these ores, and the Romans' keen interest in them, is reflected in the speed at which mines were opened up relative to the conquest of Britain. Lead mining was under way in the Mendips by AD 50, soon complemented by further mines in Derbyshire, Shropshire, Yorkshire, Wales, Durham and Northumberland over the next 20 years. Some of these mines also had argentiferous ores, meaning that silver could be extracted, as was the case in the Mendips.

The gold mines at Dolaucothi, Wales, were also operating from circa AD 70. Meanwhile, iron extraction and smelting were widespread in the Forest of Dean and in the Weald, Kent, both of which provided substantial quantities of wood to be used as fuel for smelting the raw ore. And copper was mined from various locations in northern Wales.

The extraction and smelting of all these metals – in Britain and across the Roman empire – produced so much waste in the atmosphere that today scientists are able to detect this historic pollution in ice cores.

4 For the Romans, Britain was a place of exile

Roman emperors would often exile rivals, troublemakers and criminals to islands, a process known as *deportatio in insulam*. The future emperor Tiberius lived in exile in Rhodes for eight years from 6 BC – though his residency there was self-imposed.

Britain was also a notable choice of exile. Its position on the northern fringe of the Roman empire was perhaps intended to rub further salt in the wound. According to the 4th-century writer Ammianus Marcellinus, a senior military officer named Valentinus was exiled to Britain and was later implicated in a period of turmoil known as the 'Barbarian Conspiracy'.

Palladius, an officer of the court at

Chalcedon, was exiled by the emperor Valentinian, as was an official named Frontinus (after a torture session that led to his confession).

It was not just individuals who were exiled to Britain. The archaeologist Simon James has called it a "dumping ground" for defeated barbarians, such as the more than 5,000 Sarmatian cavalry who were sent to Britain by Marcus Aurelius in 175, or the "large and strong force" of Alamanni sent in 372.



Tiberius went into exile in Rhodes, but many other Romans were sent to Britain

5 Superstition was part of daily life

Besides more formal religious practices, such as celebrating the feast of a particular god or visiting a shrine, most people in Roman Britain also participated in everyday rituals of belief – what some might call superstitions. Some of these practices are still familiar, like wearing a crucifix or amulet, using a rosary or carrying a rabbit's foot. But some of the amulets the Romans wore might raise an eyebrow today. One very popular design was a disembodied phallus, which was a symbol of good luck and protection. Amulets were carved from bone, cast in lead or bronze, and even delicately hand-crafted in gold.

Rituals and beliefs were not always happy or positive. A common practice was to ask a deity to curse someone that had wronged you. More than 130 curse tablets have been found at Roman Bath, which were then folded and deposited in the sacred spring for Sulis-Minerva to consider and act upon. The curses could be quite specific and vindictive: one person asked for whoever stole their ring to be accursed in their blood, eyes and every limb, as well as having their intestines eaten away.

So if you find yourself at a market in Roman Britain, be careful before you cross someone, and maybe invest in a perky good luck pendant! **H**



Lucky charms in Roman Britain often had a phallic theme

Rob Collins is professor of frontier archaeology at Newcastle University, with a particular interest in Hadrian's Wall, its impact on local people and other aspects of life on the fringes of the Roman empire

Succession 1603

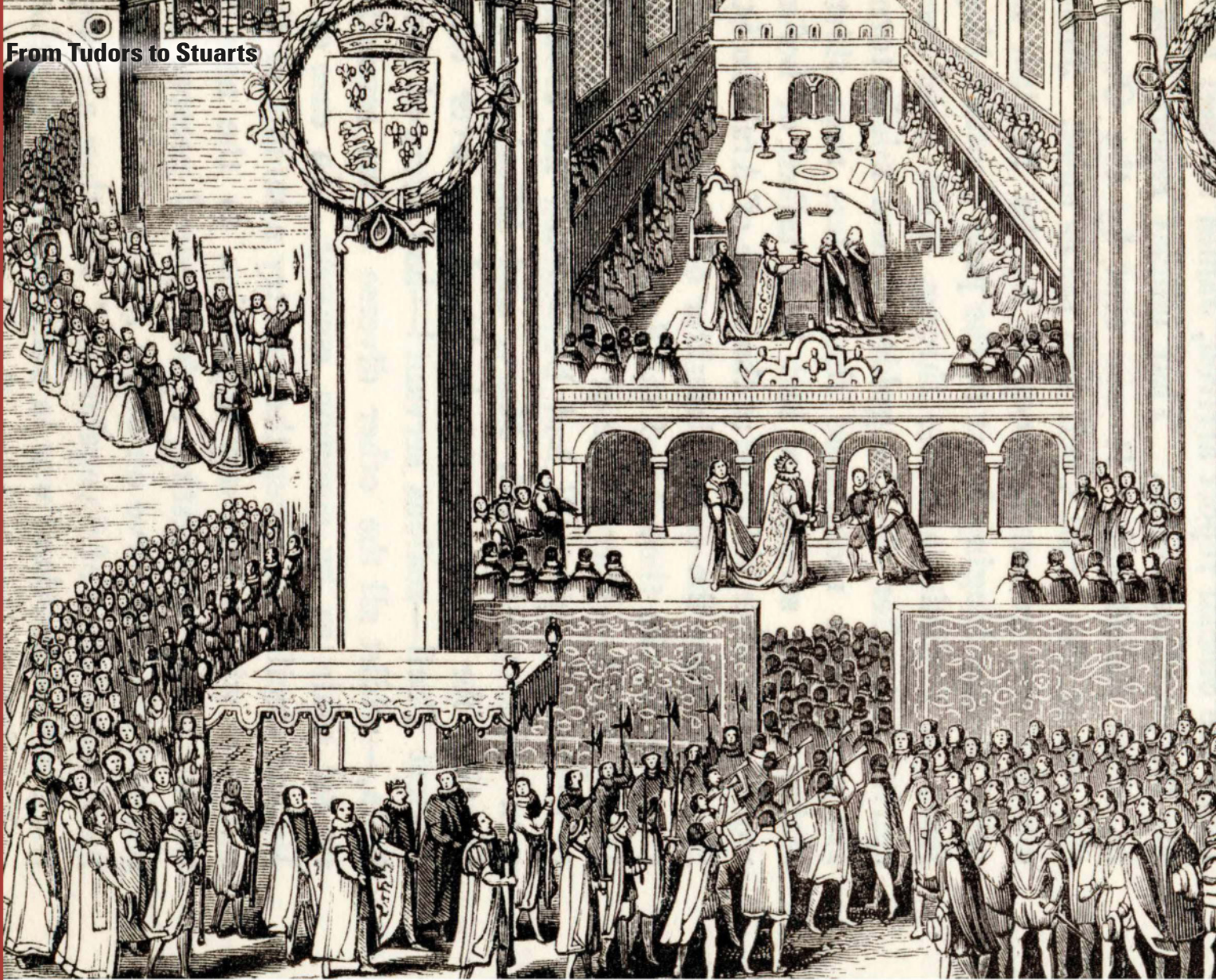
The passing of the English crown from Elizabeth I to James VI & I was welcomed by a nation hungry for change. But, writes **Susan Doran**, it wasn't long before tensions began to rise between the incoming king and his new subjects



Into the unknown

Elizabeth I's funeral procession makes its way from Whitehall to Westminster Abbey on 28 April 1603, as depicted in a drawing. The queen's death hit England like a "thunder-clap"





A contemporary depiction of the coronation of James I and Anna of Denmark at Westminster Abbey, 25 July 1603. Many believed that, under its new monarch, England would “recover her youth againe”

Early March 1603 found Sir Robert Cecil, Elizabeth I’s secretary of state, wracked by anxiety. The queen had become “ill disposed”, rapidly losing appetite and energy. It was reported that she could no longer “abide discourses of government and state”, but preferred to hear “old Canterbury tales”.

On 11 March, matters worsened dramatically. An abscess burst in the queen’s throat, causing consternation among her attendants and sparking fears that she might be dying. A week later, her demise seemed imminent.

Since Elizabeth had no named heir, the privy council had to act while she was still alive to prevent a power vacuum – or, worse still, a disputed succession. With Cecil at the helm, the council drafted a proclamation naming James VI of Scotland as the rightful king of England, and arranged for leading members of the nobility and political elite to sign it. Seemingly, no one objected. So, when Elizabeth died in the early hours of 24 March, all was ready. At 9am Cecil read out the proclamation at Whitehall

announcing James’s accession, and a deputation of lords, bishops, judges and officials processed into the City of London to promulgate it again. That same proclamation would be read out in towns and cities across England.

Reactions to the news were mixed. In some quarters, there was almost disbelief. A few people expressed “dubtes of the authority of the said proclamacon”, before receiving further assurances that James’s accession was valid. For the most part, though, the proclamation was accepted “with great ioy and the generall applause”, according to the mayor of Chester. The prevailing response was enormous relief that the transition had been managed efficiently and that James’s accession had passed unchallenged. For years, the spectre of a bloody war of succession had hung over the nation. Those fears had now been allayed. “God be thanked yt ys quietly and hapely setteled,” wrote one correspondent to Cecil, while the bishop of Chester was one of many to praise “the chiefe pillors of the state in preventinge so many dangers hanginge over our heads”.



How did James VI & I change England?

To read Tracy Borman's comprehensive guide to the first Stuart king, go to: historyextra.com/james-vi-i



The weary sovereign The figures of Old Father Time and Death loom in this posthumous portrait of Elizabeth I. The final years of the queen's long reign were dogged by war, plague and famine

Yet, mingled with relief were shock and sadness. Letter writers referred to their "great losse" and to "a heavy amasement in the people". The dramatist Thomas Dekker famously compared the report of the queen's death to "a thunder-clap", which "tooke away hearts from millions", because they "never sawe the face of any prince". At Elizabeth's funeral on 28 April, "multitudes" turned up, and "there was such a general sighing, groning, and weeping as the like hath not beene seene or knowne in the memory of man".

Start of a new chapter

Despite some alarm at the thought of change, many – possibly a majority – wanted it. Seventeen years of war against Spain, a major rebellion in Ireland, a near decade of dearth and plague, and unpopular royal policies had left the realm ready – indeed desperate – for a new regime. Plenty of people were tired of Elizabeth's rule and looking forward to an adult male king sitting on the throne for the first time since the death of Henry VIII in January 1547. One clergyman spoke for

Even before the new king arrived in London, he was bombarded with petitions that requested reforms

countless others when he maintained that "England under an aged queene did seeme to waxe olde" but now would "begin to flourish and to recover her youth againe".

Since the date of James's accession marked the arrival of spring as well as the commencement of a new calendar year (25 March), it seemed to signify a fresh start. James encouraged such hopes, for in his *Basilikon Doron*, a treatise on government that was printed in England upon his accession, he had inveighed against oppression and injustice. Even before the new king arrived in London, he was bombarded with petitions for reform on a range of subjects: religion, enclosures, abuses in the administration, and royal finances.

More narrowly, some men and women who had lost favour or been denied patronage under Elizabeth rejoiced at what they hoped was a boost to their prospects under a new monarch. Persons of rank hurried north to greet the king, "to present their service" to him, and secure rewards. One letter writer noted wryly that these people were acting as if "preferment were a goale to be got by footmanship" and "first come, first served".

At the same time, men who already held offices were apprehensive that they might lose them. According to the Venetian ambassador: "While advancing the Scotch and those English, to whom he says he is under obligation, the king shows small regard for the rest." Many of these, he noted, grew "fearful, not merely lest they should lose their appointments but lest their end be a bloody one" because of their involvement in the execution of the king's mother, Mary, Queen of Scots.

This fear proved to be unwarranted: all 15 of the Elizabethan privy councillors remained in post. But fresh blood was brought onto the council when another 12 members were added in 1603. Five of the new men were Scots, but the two most important were English: the crypto-Catholic Henry Howard, later Earl of Northampton, and his nephew Thomas Howard, now made Earl of Suffolk – both of whom had been political outsiders under the late queen. Together with Cecil, who remained secretary of state and was raised to the peerage, this triumvirate were nicknamed a "trinitie of knaves" by the new king.

Fresh faces also appeared at court. Scots monopolised James's bedchamber, which was a new household department established in 1603. Even in the privy chamber, a semi-public space, two of the most favoured English gentlemen were courtiers who had been in disgrace during Elizabeth's last years, namely William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (see box, below), and Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, who had

Anti-Scottish sentiment became ingrained in Jacobean culture, expressed in plays and parliamentary speeches

been imprisoned in the Tower for his part in the Earl of Essex's 1601 uprising until James ordered his release. The court and council were thus transformed from a fairly homogeneous elite of Protestant nobles and councillors into a heterogeneous group, differing in nationality, culture and religion.

Work hard, play hard

Elizabeth had relied most heavily on advice from leading privy councillors. The same cannot be said of James. He did not want Cecil and the Howards to give him counsel on policies concerning matters of state, but rather required them to sort out thorny

problems, such as how to improve his finances or get unpopular policies through parliament. As for the remaining English privy councillors, James expected them to carry out only what he dubbed "his general errands", the routine business of government.

James spent weeks at a time away from his council when at his favourite means of relaxation, hunting in the countryside. His companions then were his bedchamber chums who had served him loyally in Scotland, and the only English privy councillor to attend upon him was the Earl of Worcester, the Master of the Horse. The others had to communicate with the king by letter.

Unquestionably, James's hunting absences from London were deeply resented. As the Venetian ambassador reported, they suggested the king was "attending to nothing but his pleasures" and was "leaving all government in the hands of his ministers", who were free to abuse their power without royal supervision.

It did not go unnoticed that the Scots who joined the king at the chase were the main recipients of royal bounty. Those closest to him soon became personally rich, built up landed estates, and exercised considerable patronage. As a result, anti-Scottish sentiment became deeply ingrained in early Jacobean culture, expressed in plays and ballads as well as parliamentary speeches. In one scene of John Marston's rollicking comedy *The Dutch Courtesan*, performed in 1605, the anti-hero assumed the role of a Scottish barber-surgeon with the name of Andrew Shark, who claimed (in another

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

KING JAMES'S UPS AND DOWNS

Whose fortunes surged – and whose took a nosedive – in the new Stuart regime?

RISING

ARCHITECT OF THE ACCESSION

Sir Robert Cecil

Cecil was the younger son of Elizabeth I's leading minister, William, Lord Burghley, and became his father's political heir in the 1590s. In 1601, he began to correspond secretly with James VI of Scotland and pledged to manage his accession to the English throne on Elizabeth's death. He kept his word and was repaid in 1603 with the retention of all his offices and entry into the nobility.



THE HANDSOME YOUTH

William Herbert

The 3rd Earl of Pembroke (pictured) was exiled from the court in 1601 after abandoning his pregnant mistress. On Elizabeth's death he hurried north to offer James homage and the "handsome youth" quickly became an intimate of the king. At the coronation, reported the Venetian ambassador, Pembroke "actually kissed his majesty's face, whereupon the king laughed and gave him a little cuff".



THE FORTUNE SEEKER

Lucy Russell

On Elizabeth I's death, Lucy Russell, the Countess of Bedford, headed north with her mother and paternal aunt to seek patronage from Anna, the Queen Consort, and improve the family fortunes. They proved successful. Bedford was made a lady of the queen's bedchamber, and her mother became the governess of the queen's daughter, Princess Elizabeth.

obvious pun) to have been “shaving” the court for “this two year”.

Yet while it was undoubtedly true that some select Scots benefited greatly from James’s largesse, he didn’t neglect government business while at the hunt. On one occasion, he jokingly told Cecil that the number of letters he had written that evening rivalled the number of hares he had killed “all this tyme”. On issues in which he took a particular interest, James micro-managed the paperwork, changing words and rephrasing sentences on drafts of documents. When there was important business to discuss or there were vital meetings to attend, James would rush back to one of his palaces on the Thames to deal with the matter.

In fact, James took his rule in England seriously, and wasted no time before paying attention to the grievances directed to him in 1603. One of his earliest acts was to revoke monopolies granted by Elizabeth “wher private gayne hath caused publick grievance”.

The king also immediately addressed complaints about the Church of England. In the summer of 1603, he intended to call a conference at Hampton Court to hear and test criticisms made by Puritans in their petitions. At the same time, he heeded Catholic grievances. On his accession, he suspended the fines recusants had to pay for non-attendance at church and demanded an investigation into their claims that the Elizabethan collectors of fines had been bleeding them dry. A new start therefore did seem to be in the offing on all fronts.

However, it did not take long for these expectations to be dashed and “their wayne hopes deceived”. It was bound to happen. James did not have enough bounty for

Business as usual

An early modern depiction of officials processing out of Westminster Abbey. The passing of power from Tudors to Stuarts didn’t bring significant changes to the church or the state



FALLING

THE FALLEN HERO

Sir Walter Raleigh

James deprived Raleigh (pictured) of the household offices and lucrative monopolies he had enjoyed under Elizabeth I. Soon after, Raleigh was accused of planning to murder the king in the Main Plot. He was sentenced to death, but James commuted it to imprisonment. Released in 1617, Raleigh angered the Spanish while on an expedition in South America. James had him executed the next year.



THE RESENTFUL PLOTTER

Thomas Grey

The 15th Baron Grey of Wilton was out of sorts with the new regime. He wanted conditions to be imposed on James before he was proclaimed king, and he deeply resented the favour shown to his old enemy, the Earl of Southampton. Although a Puritan, he was drawn into the Catholic ‘Bye Plot’. Condemned to death, he was reprieved, and eventually died in the Tower.



THE AGEING REJECT

Elizabeth Knollys

Knollys was a cousin of Elizabeth I and served her as a maid of honour and, after 1566, as a gentlewoman of the privy chamber. Queen Anna, however, did not want to have “elderly ladies in her service”, and Knollys was one of those to go. In 1605, she complained that “her fortune be sunk with the fall of their dear late queen”, and shortly afterwards she died.



Trinity of knaves Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton (left), and his nephew Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk (centre) formed a powerful trio with Sir Robert Cecil (right), later Earl of Salisbury, in James's court

everyone and besides he made mistakes in distributing it. When it came to reforms, as one court observer shrewdly observed, “to satisfie or please all... would be more then a man's work” – especially as the demands of bishops, Puritans and Catholics were largely incompatible. Puritans found offensive the rituals retained in the revised Prayer Book issued by the bishops in February 1604, a month after the Hampton Court conference, and were appalled that, as under Elizabeth, those who refused to conform were subjected to disciplinary action.

The hopes of Catholics were also punctured. In 1603, James resumed the collection of recusancy fines, and the following February he ordered the expulsion of all Catholic priests from the realm. Later, new oppressions were enacted in parliament after the gunpowder plot of November 1605 and the assassination of the French king Henry IV by a Jesuit in 1610.

As for secular reforms, although the first session of his first parliament in 1604 passed more legislation than any of Elizabeth's parliaments, it failed to reform or abolish the burdensome royal exactions that many MPs had wanted. There was to be no overhaul of the inefficient and corrupt Elizabethan system of royal finances.

Unpopular policies

James's accession did, however, bring about a new direction in policy on two major fronts, although neither was popular. First, he brought an end to Elizabeth's war against Spain in the 1604 Treaty of London. Although the peace brought many benefits to England, merchants objected that the terms did not give them access to the Indies, an unrealistic demand anyway since it was unacceptable to the Spanish negotiators.

James did not have enough money to please all his subjects – and he made mistakes in distributing it

Second, James's accession radically altered England's relationship with Scotland. With the union of crowns, the northern realm instantly ceased to be France's back door to England, and James immediately dismantled the military border between the two realms. People on both sides of the border saw benefits in this dynastic union. The English were pleased that their security seemed stronger at a lower cost; the Scots were relieved that the wars with England now appeared to be at an end.

Both the English and Scots, however, were suspicious of the prospect of a closer union. The Scots rejected any constitutional change that would amount to the incorporation of their ancient kingdom into England, whereas MPs in England rejected any closer union unless it followed a form of incorporation mirroring the relationship between England and Wales.

James was determined to bring about a closer union without incorporation. However, he failed dismally to cajole or coerce the House of Commons into passing laws that would change the name of England to Great Britain, remove commercial tariffs between England and Scotland, and allow the mutual naturalisation of his subjects.

Foiled by parliament, the king obtained much of what he wanted by other means. By proclamation, he received “the name and stile of king of Great Brittain, France and Ireland”, which was used on coins, seals and medals. As the result of a judicial decision in 1607, all James's subjects born after 1603 were judged to be automatically naturalised and have legal rights in both his realms.

These measures raised protests in England, but James continued to pursue his British agenda. When the Ulster plantation (the organised colonisation of the province by people from England and Scotland) began in 1609, he awarded about half the land grants to Scottish applicants; on sending 4,000 soldiers to the continent, to support two German Protestant princes in a succession dispute, he insisted a third of them be Scots so that the army would be seen as British.

So was 1603 really a watershed then? The transition from the Tudor to Stuart eras didn't trigger a bloody war of succession, as some had feared. Nor did it bring about major changes in church and state. Even so, James's Scottish roots, style of rule, and promotion of unpopular policies transformed political life once he had assumed the English throne, and caused new tensions in the state. **H**

Susan Doran is professor of early modern British history at the University of Oxford. Her latest book is *From Tudor to Stuart: The Regime Change from Elizabeth I to James I* (Oxford, 2024)

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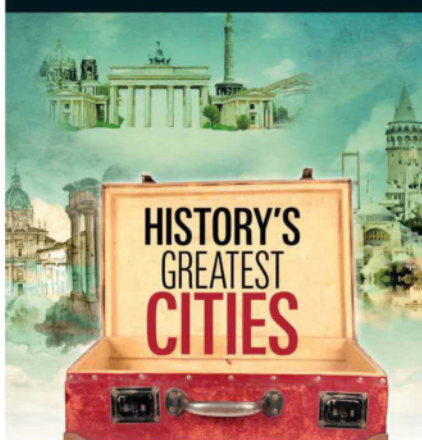
GEORGIAN



Regency gossip

With the latest series of *Bridgerton* now streaming on Netflix, the show's historical advisor, **Hannah Greig**, delves into the real-life inspiration behind the scandalous gossip sheets circulated by anonymous author Lady Whistledown.

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Urban exploration

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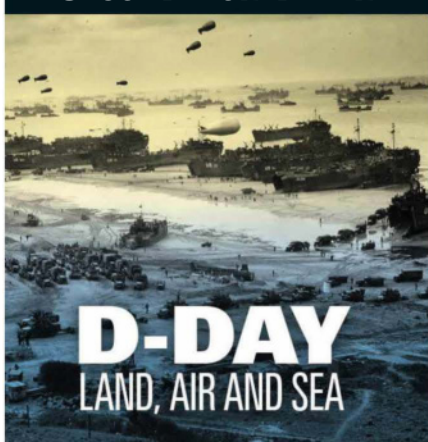
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Game changer

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D-Day stories

The invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944 was a gargantuan undertaking for the Allied forces. Eighty years on from D-Day, **Jon Bauckham** speaks to three leading military historians to find out how the decisive campaign was coordinated across land, air and sea.

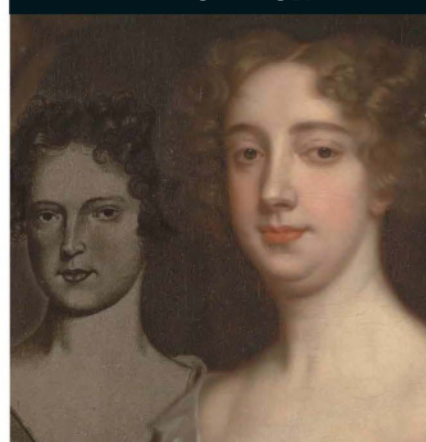
ANCIENT ROME



Restoration man

After Rome converted to Christianity, it seemed that the faith's progress was inevitable. But just a few decades later, a new pagan emperor sought to turn back the clock and reinstate the old gods. **Philip Freeman** revisits the reign of Julian – a ruler who almost changed everything.

17TH CENTURY



Lady Berkeley's lover

When Lady Henrietta Berkeley eloped with politician Lord Grey in 1682, she created a scandal that appalled many in England. **Lisa Hilton** discusses the ensuing court case and reveals how its twists and turns inspired one of the most interesting writers of the era, Aphra Behn.

THE AMERICAS

“Sacrifice was just one, much misunderstood, component of a vast worldview”

Caroline Dodds Pennock on a study of the lives of the Aztec people > page 74



BOOKS



THE TUDORS

// Estelle Paranque's book shifts the perspective on this well-worn Tudor tale by placing the French experience front and centre //

Joanne Paul praises an evocative account of the remarkable rise and devastating fall of Anne Boleyn > page 72

DIPLOMACY

“The book is a reminder of the fundamental humanity of all of those concerned”

Roger Moorhouse on the fortunes of the diplomats who dealt with Stalin > page 76

BIOGRAPHY

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INTERVIEW

Max Hastings chronicles a daring airborne raid that lifted spirits in the Second World War > page 68



“It had been a tiny triumph, but it had been a British triumph”

MAX HASTINGS talks to Rob Attar about a daring airborne raid that provided a much-needed boost to Britain's morale in the darkest days of the Second World War

Rob Attar: Many of your previous books have focused on the big campaigns and the most famous events of the Second World War. So what drew you to the relatively unknown Operation Biting?

Max Hastings: Because I'm getting a bit older and a bit slower, I want to focus on miniatures rather than the big stuff. So I've been picking small episodes that seem to illustrate important realities about bigger things – and which are also jolly good stories in their own right.

The Bruneval Raid [Operation Biting] in February 1942 was a British success story at a time when not much else was going well. And it involved all sorts of fascinating personalities – starting, of course, with Churchill. At that stage of the war, when so many battles were being lost, he always wanted to keep raids going on the occupied coast of Europe. This was partly to remind the Americans that we were still in the war business, partly to cheer up the British people, and also partly to serve some very important objectives.

What were those objectives?

What was at stake really mattered. Bomber Command, during its attacks into Europe, was suffering more and more from German radar-directed fighters. The British were catching a new sort of radar they didn't know much about, which the Germans called the Würzburg-Gerät.

The genius of British scientific intelligence, Reg Jones, always liked to think that he could work out anything just by thinking about it long enough – but in this case, both he and the Telecommunications

Research Establishment felt there was no substitute for getting a look at the real thing. And suddenly they saw this aerial photograph, in December 1941, of a radar station near Bruneval, about 12 miles away from Le Havre. They could see this black thing down there, which they were pretty sure was a Würzburg antenna.

They sent a Spitfire over to photograph it, and he came back with one of the great aerial images of the war, of this indisputable radar dish aerial. Reg Jones was frustrated: it was so near, and yet so far. And then he thought, maybe it was so far and yet so near. Maybe it was only a short hop by aircraft across the water. Maybe they could kidnap this thing.

How did an operation get off the ground?

Reg Jones took his idea to the Chief of the Air

Staff in the first instance, who approved it. The Chief of the Air Staff took it to the Chiefs of Staff. And Churchill loved it. Then there was also this new guy on the block in charge of “combined operations,” Lord Louis Mountbatten.

Mountbatten was one of the fascinating figures of the war. Everybody still argues about whether he was a great leader or whether he was a charlatan. I think he was a bit both. The public loved him because he had film star good looks, was a cousin of the king's and he talked a brilliant game. And his men loved him because he always remembered their names.

Mountbatten wanted an operation to put himself on the map; he saw combined operations as a sort of film set on which he was the executive producer. Of course he wanted to help the war effort – but he also wanted to help Mountbatten.

Why was it decided to use airborne troops?

The planners got to work and they saw at once that the Germans had had the best part of two years in which to mine, wire and fortify all the beaches in north-west France. If British troops landed there, they'd be dead before they got anywhere near the top of the cliff.

The only way to do it was from the air, to land men on the cliff around the radar station, and this required another revolutionary new force in warfare – paratroopers.

At that stage, Britain only had two battalions of paratroopers. Mountbatten and the chiefs approached Major General Boy Browning and asked if his paratroopers could land in the night and get at this radar station, and Browning said absolutely they could.

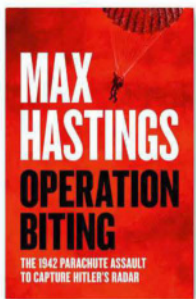
How did they train for the operation?

Browning took a look at the two battalions he had and decided that C Company of the Second Battalion were shaping up best for the operation. They were overwhelmingly Scottish – with some English officers, but basically very tough eggs from the wrong side of Glasgow.

They were moved down to near Salisbury, close to where there was an airfield from which they could take off on this raid. The training did not go that wonderfully because the weather was terrible. There was a lot of snow, rain and wind.

The trickiest part of the operation was that they were all going to be evacuated by sea. It was incredibly optimistic to reckon that they could get landing craft across the Channel and bring them back without anybody noticing or interfering.

So that was pretty optimistic on the part of Mountbatten's planners, but they were feeling in a pretty sunny mood and they figured it could be done. But when they started the exercises on the south coast and in Scotland, they found out that the commanders of these landing



**Operation Biting:
The 1942 Parachute
Assault to Capture
Hitler's Radar**

by Max Hastings
(William Collins,
384 pages, £25)



PROFILE

Max Hastings is a military historian and journalist who is the former editor-in-chief of *The Daily Telegraph* and editor of *The Evening Standard*. He has written numerous bestselling books on the Second World War

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JENI NOTT

craft weren't particularly good at finding beaches in the night and picking up paratroopers.

They got to the last week of February 1942 and the weather was still pretty awful – there was snow in northern France – but everybody was mad keen to go, even though the exercises had been a shambles. Churchill wanted it, Mountbatten wanted it, Browning wanted it. So they said: “Right, we’re going to go, we’re going to do it.”

Can you describe the landings for us?

On the night of 27 February 1942, 120 men of the 2nd Parachute Battalion, with engineers to dismantle a radar station, took off for France in Whitley bombers. The flight seemed pretty easy, but it was dark and these were bomber pilots who’d never dropped paratroopers before other than in an exercise. There was quite a bit of flak, two or three of the planes were hit, and they wobbled around all over the place, meaning quite a few of them got lost.

The paratroopers were ejected into the night over northern France and quite a lot of them turned up in the right place, including the raid’s leader, Johnny Frost, and the engineers who were supposed to dismantle the device.

Half of Frost’s company were in the wrong place, but he decided he’d got to go ahead anyway, and so he and the guys with him trotted, trudged and plodded through the snow the half-mile to this German radar position.

How easy was it to capture the device?

All the luck went with the British that night. The Germans had seen all these paratroopers come down, because the moonlight lit up northern France for them. But because some of the guys had got lost and dropped all over Normandy, the Germans were very confused about what they might be trying to do.

The fact they were lost actually helped the British: Frost and his people were able to get up to the radar station and attack it at first without a shot being fired by the Germans. It was a triumphant success. They killed three or four Germans, but all the rest bolted for it and the engineers got to work taking this thing to pieces.

The other thing Reg Jones wanted was a prisoner – one of the technicians, to tell them how this thing worked. And although most of the Germans ran like hell for the main radar station half a mile away, one of them was stupid enough to bolt over the edge of the cliff. The British chased after him, and they found him literally hanging about 10 feet below the cliff.

One of Frost’s platoon commanders burst out laughing. He said



The radar system at Bruneval pictured before its capture by British paratroopers in February 1942

// The fact they were lost actually helped the British: Frost and his people were able to get up to the radar station and attack it at first without a shot being fired by the Germans //

he’d never seen anything so funny as this German trying to climb back up the cliff while holding his hands in the air to indicate that he’d surrendered. There was a movement in favour of shooting him, because all these hyped-up Glaswegians were dying to kill somebody, but they kept him alive. They knew they wanted the prisoner.

Of course, by now the Germans had woken up and quite a fire fight started. There were about 100 Germans in the area who were shooting in all directions, though not very efficiently because most of them were Luftwaffe technicians, not soldiers. But bullets were starting to zing through the radar dish and one of Frost’s soldiers was killed.

After about 10–15 minutes, the engineers were pretty confident that they had all the bits that mattered and Frost said: “Right, we’ll get out of here,” and they started to retreat.

Was it difficult for the British troops to escape?

Frost sent a dozen men down to try to break through to the beach, but they ran into all these thoroughly awakened Germans in trenches overlooking the beach, who were firing pretty effectively. So Frost’s men were stuck. He was getting pretty windy, because he thought: “Here we are, we’ve succeeded, we’ve got everything. But the way to the beach is still blocked and there’s no sign of all these other guys.”

But amazingly, one young lieutenant called Charteris, who’d been dropped two miles from the objective, had run like hell with his platoon, back up towards the battlefield. Charteris very bravely ran into some Germans on the way and had a shoot-out with them. By taking a long detour, they got round them and eventually got to the top of the cliff and reported to Frost with four men.

Frost was disappointed – he was hoping for about 20 – but Charteris ran down the hill and they charged the German position and broke the deadlock, clearing the way to the beach. So Frost and his men descended to the beach, but there was one more drama.

As they approached the beach, there was no sign of the landing craft. Unbelievably, they waited on that beach another half hour before the landing craft finally arrived. The Germans were starting to appear, but, partly because of the weather, they’d been very slow. In the end, the landing craft turned up and everybody rushed into them. There was a sort of riot; the plan went out of the window. They loaded the wounded men and the radar parts aboard a high-speed motor gunboat, and that steamed off at high speed for Portsmouth. The rest had to go back in the landing craft at a speed of nine knots.

And here was another miracle. They were at sea for another 12 to 14 hours, and yet the Germans still did nothing. Their warships hadn’t got radar and couldn’t find the British in the bad weather, and the Luftwaffe, for reasons we don’t know, did nothing.

What kind of reception did the men get back in Britain?

When they finally turned up at Portsmouth, it was to a hero’s welcome, with everybody playing *Rule Britannia* on the ships’ broadcast systems. It had been a tiny triumph, but it had been a British triumph.



Drama in the snow

You can hear an extended version of this interview on our podcast soon: historyextra.com/podcast



Pioneering paras Bruneval was one of the first operations carried out by Britain's new parachute regiments, and those who took part in the raid – seen here making their way back to the UK – were afforded a heroes' welcome on their return.

When Johnny Frost got back to the camp, he was just getting in the bath when he was suddenly dragged out of it and told: "You've got to go to London immediately, the prime minister wants to see you."

This was a time when Churchill's fortunes were at a very low ebb. Singapore had just surrendered, the British were taking a hammering in the desert, and there had been a huge scandal because the German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had passed up the Channel without the navy doing anything to stop them. So in the war rooms below Whitehall, Churchill gathered the entire war cabinet and chiefs of staff to hear the story, and when Frost arrived, Churchill said: "Well done, Major Frost, now tell us all about it."

But of course, Mountbatten wasn't having any of that. He was absolutely determined that he was going to get the glory for himself, so he stepped up and told the story of the raid. Poor old Johnny Frost hardly got a word in.

You've used words like 'luck' and 'miracle' in our conversation. Did the British therefore learn the wrong lessons from this raid?

The worst consequence of the raid was that Mountbatten and some of those around him got cocky about what the Germans could or couldn't do. Because they'd been so lucky, and the German response to Bruneval had been so pathetic, they got the idea they could do this again. And a few months later, in August 1942, they staged the much bigger Dieppe raid, which was a complete disaster, because everything that could go wrong did.

Whereas at Bruneval the naval contingent had got across the Channel both ways without being intercepted, the huge convoy setting off for Dieppe ran into the Germans at sea. So the Germans were already thoroughly alerted by the time the British arrived on the beach at Dieppe, and threw everything they had at them.

Bruneval remained unique. In fact, General Student, who was the German paratrooper general, described Bruneval as the most successful British raid of the war – and so it was.

How useful to the Allied war effort was the equipment that was captured in Operation Biting?

The whole story of the 'boffins' war' is of this relentless contest between rival technologies, of measures and countermeasures by each side. The balance of advantage changed constantly, but Bruneval gave the British a very important advantage in the short term. Reg Jones was able to work out exactly how this radar system worked, and therefore the British came to the right conclusion that the thing to do was to flood bombers through the system so that most of them would get through. And for a short while that was entirely successful.

But mostly it was a propaganda advantage. The raid made the main headlines in every British newspaper for days. February 1942 was a pretty awful time, when the Russians seemed to be fighting like tigers while our armies were doing nothing and we didn't seem to be able to do anything right. So Operation Biting was a great tonic for people.

At later stages in the war, when you had the big battles, when you had the Normandy campaign going on, nobody would have thought about Bruneval. But at that stage of the war, it was as if the floodlights were all turned on in Wembley Stadium and you had this game being conducted in one tiny corner of the pitch. It was a miniature, but at that stage miniatures were important.

In the book, you write that when you were a newspaper editor, you were very careful about using the word 'hero'. But is it fair to say you believe that the men who participated in this raid qualify for that term?

I think one should use the word 'hero' very carefully, and we nowadays use it much too frivolously and promiscuously. But yes, the men at Bruneval were jolly brave and they did it very well.

Does it require a particular amount of bravery to jump from an airplane over enemy territory?

I myself once took part in a mass night drop in Cyprus. That was in November 1963, and by then parachuting had become much more sophisticated. For a start, we all carried reserve parachutes, whereas during the Second World War the British thought that was a vaguely sissy idea and didn't have them.

This was a battalion drop and everybody was told, if you got injured in the drop, to put your red light on. One of my clearest memories is of when I landed, to find red lights on everywhere – so many people were injured in the drop. It was two hours after we landed on that exercise before the battalion was ready to move, and it just convinced me that even in peacetime, on exercises, parachute night drops are a shambles.

The trouble with paratroopers is they always end up being dropped all over the place. That's always been the story and it always will be. Everybody was still learning the limitations of paratroopers back in 1942, and what's so amazing is how well they did despite those shambolic conditions. **H**



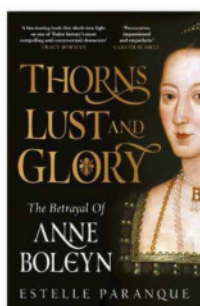
Love at second sight?

A depiction of Anne Boleyn's 'first' meeting with Henry VIII – at Cardinal Wolsey's London residence. According to Estelle Paranque, the couple's paths had already crossed in France

THE TUDORS

Anne Boleyn, 'princess' of France

JOANNE PAUL is impressed by an account of how the Tudor queen's continental connections shaped her meteoric rise and dramatic fall



Thorns, Lust and Glory: The Betrayal of Anne Boleyn
by Estelle Paranque
Ebury Press,
304 pages, £25

Draped in a jewel-studded gold cloak, the strapping king Henry VIII entered the lodging of Queen Claude at Ardres in the

north-eastern corner of France. Not to be outdone, Claude was dripping in emeralds and diamonds, her splendour accentuated by the gold-clad ladies-in-waiting who surrounded her. It was June 1520.

The king's attentions were, initially at least, directed towards Claude. But it would have been highly out of character for him not to have passed his gaze over her women, described as "the most beautiful that could be". Among them was the woman he would later fall in love with, move heaven and Earth to marry, and – ultimately – destroy.

When Henry and Anne encountered one another for the first time, as Estelle Paranque's new book highlights, they were in France, not England, and Anne was presented as a member of the French, not English, court. Far more than an affectation, Anne's Frenchness was at the core of her identity and her interactions with the Tudor court. It was also, as Paranque demonstrates, at the core of her sudden and dramatic fall.

Thorns, Lust and Glory: The Betrayal of Anne Boleyn shifts the perspective on this well-worn Tudor tale by placing the French

// Anne's Frenchness was at the core of her identity and her interactions with the Tudor court //

experience front and centre. This fits with a recent movement in Tudor popular history, presenting a more holistic, less nationally bounded vision of the period, more accurate to the politics of the time. State lines were mutable, royal families interbred (sometimes, at least), and a death, battle, marriage or birth on the continent often had dramatic implications in England.

The life of Anne Boleyn becomes a perfect canvas to showcase the importance of this wider European – and, at times, global – perspective. Born in England, Boleyn spent her formative years in the Netherlands before joining the retinue of the queen of France.

This is, of course, well-known. But Paranque imagines the effects this had on the young Anne, not the least of which was the influence of the many powerful women she would have encountered abroad. Boleyn was raised in the shadow of impressive queens: how could she not have harboured a desire to achieve such greatness herself?

Paranque's shift in perspective also re-frames some of the pivotal events in Anne's life. For instance, her betrothal to her cousin James Butler – and her subsequent return to England – is recast as cover for a diplomatic recall in the context of renewed conflict between England and France.

Feeding her father

Paranque also introduces us to Anne Boleyn, the spy. Thomas Boleyn, Anne's father, was on embassy in France during his daughter's stay there, reporting back to the English court. Paranque points us to intelligences in his letters about the queen's health, mood and movements that could only have come from within her own privy chamber, where Anne was stationed. It is speculative, but likely, that

it was Anne herself who fed her father this information. This conclusion comes in the context of a raft of new work on the role played by women in early modern espionage – many of them, like Anne, ladies-in-waiting.

If Anne's French connections fuelled her rise, it also contributed to her arrest and execution in the spring of 1536. But the question is: to what extent? Paranque argues that, while Henry VIII's temper and ego ultimately lay at the heart of Anne's betrayal, diplomatic relations between England and France also played a role.

The connections between international politics and private relationships were just as evident in the divorce of her predecessor, Catherine of Aragon. But, as Anne wasn't an actual princess, she was discarded more easily. She was, however, French at heart – in Paranque's words "almost a French princess herself" – and that made the French abandonment of her (as Paranque details in the final chapters of the book) perhaps an even more devastating betrayal than that of her royal husband.

Paranque treats us to a vivid portrayal of Anne's life before that betrayal, mining the sources adeptly for details to furnish her tale. Some might quibble over her use of dialogue, or her claims about the mindsets of historical figures, but speculation and imagination are the homeland of the historian, whatever the medium, and Paranque is careful not to step into that territory of the fiction-writer: invention.

If anything, the book could have been longer, giving the narrative and the argument more room to breathe. At times, it feels as if Paranque is forced to sacrifice detail and proximity to Anne's own experience in order to keep the reader abreast of the constantly shifting developments in European politics.

The staccato paragraphs and nippy pace can make the story feel rushed. This is understandable towards the end of Anne's life – her elevation and destruction happened in three short years. But most readers, I suspect, would enjoy spending a little more time with Anne during her French upbringing.

This is even more the case given there is a real beauty to Paranque's prose. In one stunning section, she shows us an adolescent Anne in Provence, four years before she first met Henry. It might be difficult to imagine her on the shores of the Mediterranean, a French lady, well before she became an English queen. This is an Anne Boleyn we are not used to seeing but who must be seen, if we have any hope of understanding her and her place in history. **H**

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Joanne Paul is the author of *The House of Dudley: A New History of Tudor England* (Penguin, 2022)

ON THE PODCAST

Analysing Anne

Deputy editor **Matt Elton** picks three episodes of the *HistoryExtra* podcast that profile Boleyn

Defending the queen



Estelle Paranque (left) discusses her new take on Anne in a podcast episode set to air later in June. She's a spirited defender of the queen, and suggests that the misconception of

her as a homewrecker obscures a more complex story of a woman determined to stand up for herself against the odds. She argues that it's that fierce, if flawed, character that helps explain her popularity into the 21st century.
historyextra.com/ab-paranque-pod

Courtly secrets



In this conversation from our *Six Wives* podcast series, Tracy Borman and Owen Emmerson set out to separate fact from the fiction that swirls around Boleyn's life. Does she deserve to

be characterised as a backstabber? How was she viewed at the Tudor court? And what was really behind her dramatic fall from grace?
historyextra.com/ab-secrets-pod

Family ties

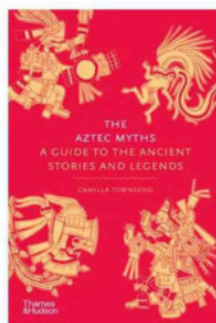


Elizabeth I was less than three years old when her mother was executed in May 1536. Yet Anne still had an enormous impact on the Tudor queen – as a daughter, a woman

and a ruler. That's the view of Tracy Borman, who returned for this 2023 episode to share more expert insights into Anne's life and character.
historyextra.com/ab-borman-pod

An Aztec history of the Aztecs

CAROLINE DODDS PENNOCK is won over by a guide to Aztec mythology dominated by dramatic Indigenous descriptions of their world



The Aztec Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Stories and Legends

by Camilla Townsend
Thames & Hudson,
208 pages, £14.99

The history of the Aztecs (or, as they would have called

themselves, the Mexica) is riddled with colonial prejudice and contemporary misconception. But, as Camilla Townsend contends in this fine new book, the Aztecs' own dramatic tales of their ferocity also contributed to these bloodthirsty stereotypes as they sought to frighten their enemies and mitigate their defeats with exaggerated claims of sacrificial and military violence.

Townsend's Aztecs were expert storytellers, who deployed their histories strategically to teach the past and influence the present. In the case of sacrifice, argues Townsend, "their approach backfired", and these stories have loomed over their history ever since. But, as the author ably shows, sacrifice was just one, much misunderstood, component of a vast and layered worldview where divine demands stood in tension with everyday human concerns.

Largely eschewing talking about the 'myths' of the title for its potentially dismissive tone, Townsend gives us a neat new history of the Aztecs through their own evocative 'stories', as recorded in early colonial Nahuatl annals, songs and codices. By excluding Spanish-language sources, she hopes to tip the balance back towards Indigenous understandings of their own histories, and open a window onto a rich corpus of stories that are often marginalised in favour of easier-to-access European narratives.

Although historians might quibble about the choice of texts, or where the emphasis lies, Townsend succeeds magnificently in conjuring up the world of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, which, as one source relates, was "the place of renown, the sign, the site of the rock tuna cactus, in the middle of the water; the place where the eagle rests, where he screeches, where he stretches and eats; where the

serpent hisses, where the fish fly, where the blue and yellow waters mingle". It is a tale of high politics, spy dramas and divine intervention, where gods and sorcerers mingled with rulers and wise women.

Townsend never hides the complexities of this history, giving lucid introductions to the historical debates as well as handy summaries and tables of key information. The compact, high-quality hardback is reassuringly unimposing, with a welcoming, lively style and plenty of pictures. I do wish that some of the illustrations were in colour to

give a sense of the vibrancy of the Indigenous art and writing, but I realise this is a constraint of the series format, not to mention the cost. It is a credit to the author that she succeeds in packing so much nuance and detail into this enjoyable and accessible short text. I will certainly be using it for teaching, and recommending it to friends.

The book shows a world that matters, where people made choices with consequences, lived and died and loved, and left descendants who kept their stories and continue to do so today. To centre these histories is an act of resistance that enriches our understanding and enlivens our imagination. I hope this book finds a wide readership among those who care about history.

To echo Townsend, "the world as a whole benefits from keeping alive the endangered traditions of Native Americans, for it is stories in all their wondrous variety that bring us true wisdom". **H**

Caroline Dodds Pennock is the author of *On Savage Shores: How Indigenous Americans Discovered Europe* (W&N, 2023)

// Sacrifice was just one, much misunderstood, component of a vast and layered worldview //



Power trio A depiction of three Aztec leaders, including (right) Moctezuma II, under whom the Aztec empire reached its greatest size. Camilla Townsend's book "is a tale of high politics, spy dramas and divine intervention"

What can 1984 teach 2024?

ROBIN BUNCE praises a book that explores George Orwell's writings on everything from race to censorship – and asks, what can we learn from him today?



**Orwell's Ghosts:
Wisdom and
Warnings for the
21st Century**
by Laura Beers
C Hurst,
224 pages, £20

Years after his death, George Orwell is everywhere. Social

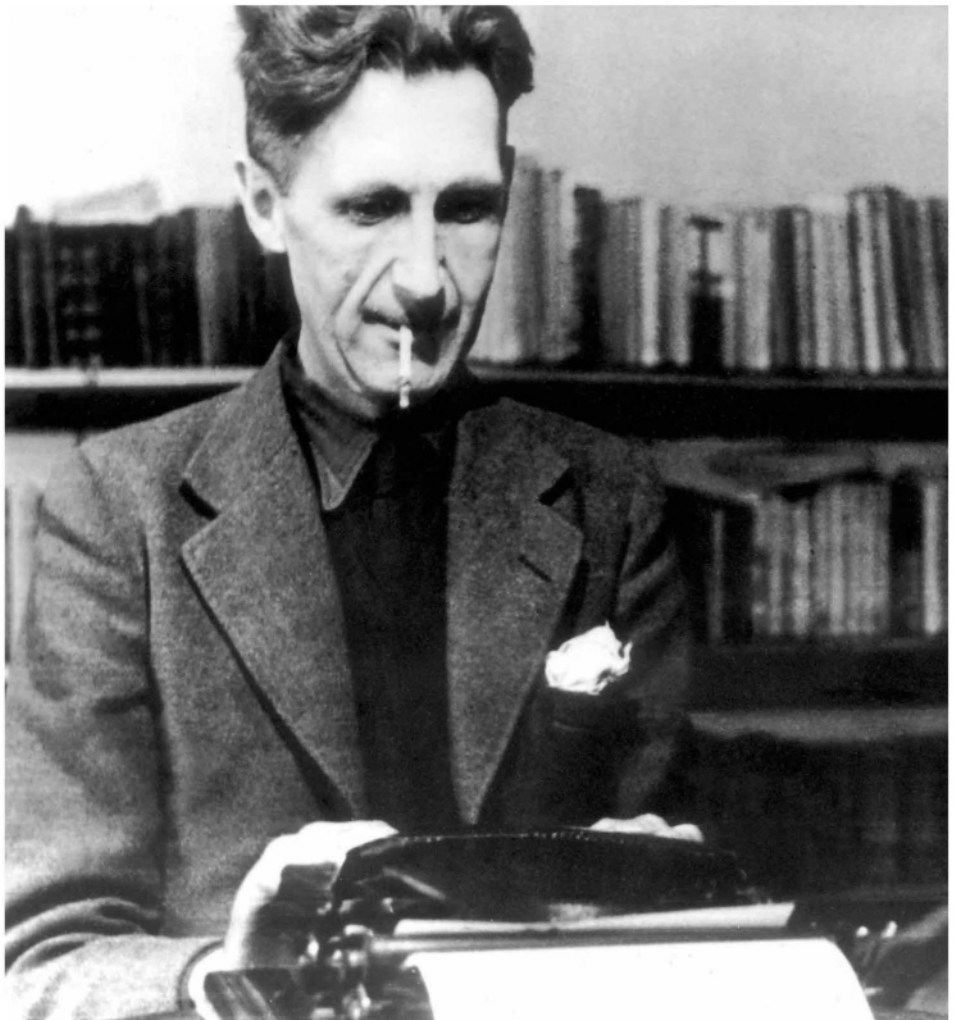
media is littered with protests about 'Orwellian censorship', Big Brother and the Ministry of Truth. In this context, Laura Beers' new book, *Orwell's Ghosts*, is essential reading. Beers' approach is to situate Orwell in his original context, recover his concerns and, from this vantage point, address contemporary debates.

Beer starts with the vexed question of 'Orwellian cancel culture'. Here, she argues that there is simply no comparison between the fate of celebrities who are 'cancelled' on social media, and Winston Smith's torture in the cellars of the Ministry of Love. And, in opposition to claims about the 'Orwellian censorship' of 'alternative facts', she observes that for Orwell, freedom was the ability to hold the state to account by insisting that $2+2=4$. Orwell never defended the freedom of the powerful to hide behind the lie that $2+2=5$.

Like Orwell, Beers asks her readers to face 'unpleasant facts'. On the topic of race, she argues that, while Orwell's writings clearly contain racist stereotypes, he was an implacable opponent of the institutionalised racial domination of empire. She tackles Orwell's misogyny, too, discussing everything from his casual sexism and the apparent relish with which his novels depict sexual violence. And she also explores claims that Orwell was guilty of sexual assault.

Any suggestion that Orwell was simply 'a man of his time', argues Beer, ignores the fact that his attitudes were chauvinistic even by the standards of the mid-20th century. His alleged behaviour would, in his own day, have been regarded as indefensible.

So should he be cancelled? Beers thinks not, suggesting that he still has much to say



A man for all seasons

George Orwell at his typewriter. Seventy years after his death, the creator of *Big Brother* and the Ministry of Love still has a great deal to say to us today

to the contemporary world. Significantly, Beers argues that Orwell's example can help us interrogate the repeated failure of progressive movements to shake off deep-seated prejudices against women and minorities. In that sense, Orwell's example is instructive, as it reveals something important about progressive doublethink.

For Winston Smith, the best books tell us what we already know. *Orwell's Ghosts* goes beyond this. It presents this world-famous author in all his complexity – and, in so doing, offers important insights on some of our most pressing concerns. **11**

// Laura Beer argues that Orwell's attitudes were chauvinistic, even by the standards of his time //

Robin Bunce is fellow in politics at Homerton College, University of Cambridge



Eye of the storm

Kathleen Harriman (third left) with fellow US war correspondents in 1943. Serving as an aide in Moscow, she witnessed Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin's fractious relationship first-hand

SECOND WORLD WAR

Dancing with the Devil

ROGER MOORHOUSE is impressed by a book that traces the fortunes of the diplomats charged with managing the west's wartime alliance with Josef Stalin



The Stalin Affair: The Impossible Alliance that Won the War

by Giles Milton
John Murray,
384 pages, £25

In an age of history-writing seemingly chock full of reassessments, regurgitations and 're-imaginings', it is satisfying to review a book that is based on a genuinely new archival source. Giles Milton's *The Stalin Affair* uses as its core the papers of Kathleen Harriman – daughter of the flamboyant millionaire Averell Harriman – to give a precious

insight into wartime inter-Allied relations. They tell a fascinating tale.

Kathleen – or Kathy, as she was known – was barely 23 and leading the life of an ordinary socialite, when her father called her to join him in London in the spring of 1941. Averell Harriman had been sent to the British capital by President Franklin D Roosevelt to smooth Anglo-American relations, as the US slid inexorably towards active participation in the European war.

Harriman – dashing, handsome and intellectually acute – would become one of the most significant movers and shakers in the Allied cause: a trusted adviser to Roosevelt, a regular at Chequers, a man for whom every diplomatic and political door, it seemed, was open. This was the world into which

he brought Kathy – a “lively brunette with a forthright manner” – in the hope that it would be the making of her. She would spend the next four years as an observer at the very top table of Allied diplomacy.

Throughout that period, she would be no mere passenger. Despite her tender years, she worked first as a journalist, and when she wasn't weekendening with the Churchills or dining with Lord Beaverbrook, she was touring Britain's bombed-out suburbs writing copy for British dailies or American weeklies. In time, she accompanied her father to Moscow – where he was appointed US ambassador – and where she would serve as his unofficial aide and assistant, participating both in the social whirl and the political maelstrom that ensued.

// Even Stalin evinces a human side: a man momentarily intimidated by the plethora of cutlery at an embassy banquet //

It was in this capacity that Kathy Harriman not only became personally acquainted with many of the key players of the war – Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt most prominent among them – but also played an active role herself. She learned very passable Russian, for instance, and was appointed to head the embassy's public relations effort.

Kathy would be among the group of western journalists that was taken to the killing fields of Katyn in a sinister Soviet attempt to convince their Allies that the Germans, and not their own NKVD, had carried out the massacre of some 22,000 Polish officers earlier in the war. She remembered the “measly pine wood”, the death pits and the inescapable stench of death, as the murdered were exhumed. As her father's trusted aide and confidante, she would also be granted a ring-side seat at the Yalta conference in February 1945, observing the making of the postwar world. She even toasted Stalin, in Russian, at the closing banquet.

The human thread

Though the story told by Milton is a much broader one – of the creation and maintenance of the Grand Alliance during the Second World War – the red thread that runs through it, and the prism through which it is largely seen, is that of the Harrimans, and primarily of Kathy. It makes for an interesting and novel perspective, a way to provide a very human leaven to the – never boring but rather drier – political narrative of the Grand Alliance.

Her musings – and her social circle – were augmented by a cast of engaging cameos, including the Yugoslav communist revolutionary Tito, the maverick British ambassador to Moscow, Archibald Clark Kerr, and Harriman's lugubrious, workaholic assistant, Bob Meiklejohn.

The result is a fascinating, occasionally somewhat breathless ‘fly-on-the-wall’ account of proceedings, which is full of vignettes, set pieces and pen portraits of the

main protagonists. Churchill, Harriman wrote, was “much smaller than I expected and a lot less fat”, while Roosevelt was “absolutely charming”. Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov, meanwhile, had “nice twinkling eyes”.

The thoughtful reader might perhaps wonder what all these asides – entertaining though they are – tell us about the period in question. The book certainly drags the curious world of wartime diplomacy into a rather sharper focus than has hitherto been the case, casting a spotlight on the spats and the rivalries, as well as the idiosyncrasies of some of those concerned. Clark Kerr's habit of writing with a quill pen, not to mention his gleeful receipt of the ‘gift’ of a Russian masseur from Stalin, will doubtless dwell in readers' memories. Milton reminds us that it was Clark Kerr who wrote the now celebrated ‘Dear Reggie’ letter to a colleague, after meeting an amusingly named Turkish envoy.

More than that, though, the book is a reminder of the fundamental humanity of all of those concerned. Churchill is shown, up close, both in his benign, avuncular mood, and as the rather darker depressive, sometimes at the mercy of his emotions and weighed down by the great burden of the war and the expectation of his people. Even Stalin evinces a human side: a man momentarily intimidated by the plethora of cutlery at an embassy banquet, and one evidently genuinely moved by the news of President Roosevelt's death.

Averell Harriman, too, is thrust into the spotlight, and for all his arrogance and bullishness, emerges as one of the most perspicacious of those directly engaged in the protracted wrangles and negotiations with the Soviets. Tellingly, while Roosevelt convinced himself that he had charmed Stalin at Yalta, and Churchill believed that he had finally mended fences with the Soviet dictator, Harriman was much less easily seduced. For all the bonhomie on display in early 1945, he was cautious, unable to forget the inhuman cruelties of the Soviet system and its as yet unsated appetite for territorial expansion. As he confided to his assistant: “One cannot help but feel that being an ally of these bastards is only one step better than being their enemy.” Within months, he would be proved right.

This is the world that has been vividly and memorably brought to life in Giles Milton's compellingly readable account. It is a worthy addition to any history enthusiast's bookshelf. **A**

Roger Moorhouse's books include *The Forgers: The Forgotten Story of the Holocaust's Most Audacious Rescue Operation* (Bodley Head, 2023)

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Empire of the son

Conn Iggulden discusses *Nero*, the first novel in his new series that dramatises the life of the infamous Roman emperor

The first instalment in your new Nero trilogy follows the experiences of his mother, Agrippina (pictured). Why did you decide to focus on her story?

Agrippina is the ultimate survivor. How could she be anything but ruthless, given her family and upbringing? She survived murders, plots, exile and terrible violence to keep her son alive. When Caligula sent his sister into exile, it was without fortune or favour. Her little boy was taken from her and sent to live with impoverished relatives. It was the end of everything... and yet she lived to return. She is one of the great characters of history – and so is the son she raised, for all his flaws.

What impression of the pair's relationship did you want to convey?

When Agrippina's son became emperor at just 16, it's clear she expected to remain part of the establishment, as a dowager empress. Sister to one emperor, wife to another, mother to a third, she was a pivotal figure of her generation, yet access to power would prove harder than she expected. This is a story of mother and son, but there is a ruthlessness here that is both terrifying and rare.

You've said that Nero's story is written by his enemies. How did you set about redressing this?

I had to go back to the things we knew for certain, regardless of how they were portrayed. We know enough about spin and political bias now, I think, to look past the spite and prurience to the man. I've no doubt that Nero was flawed and cruel. If I had been given ultimate power at 16, I imagine I'd have caused havoc. Yet he was a better man than [Roman historian] Suetonius would have it. It has been my privilege to tell his story.

Nero
by Conn Iggulden
Penguin Michael Joseph,
416 pages, £22



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Mrs. K, April 2023

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Staffordshire Hoard photo credit: Birmingham Museums Trust on behalf of Birmingham City Council and The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent.

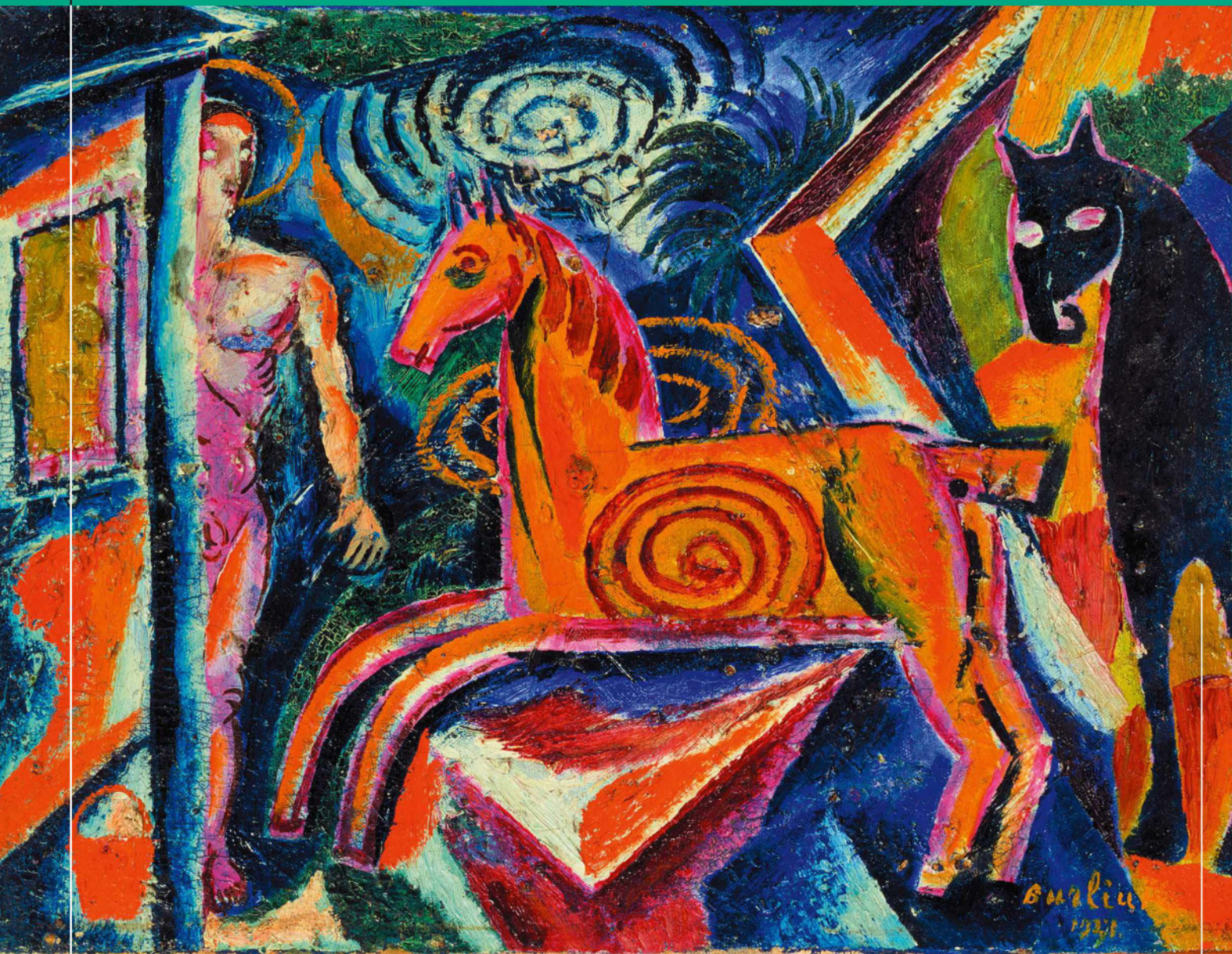
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DIARY By Jonathan Wright and Danny Bird
COOKBOOK Victorian cucumber ice cream
TRAVEL Tokyo, Japan

ENCOUNTERS



EXHIBITION

The cutting edge of modernity

Against the backdrop of the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union, a rich vein of artistic modernism emerged in Ukraine during its fleeting independence in the early 20th century. From avant-garde Cubo-Futurism to vibrant theatre design, a new exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts showcases an extraordinary range of art created in the country between 1900 and the 1930s.

Featuring 65 pieces, including loans from prestigious Ukrainian museums, *In the Eye of the Storm* features artists whose work had a

significant impact on Ukraine's culture. The importance of the cities of Kharkiv and Kyiv as artistic hubs comes to the fore, but the exhibition concludes with the generation silenced by Stalin's artistic repression in the early 1930s.

In the Eye of the Storm promises to be a powerful testament to modern art's role in shaping Ukrainian identity and aspirations for statehood.

In the Eye of the Storm

Royal Academy of Arts, London /
29 June–13 October / royalacademy.org.uk

Davyd Burliuk's *Carousel*, painted in 1921, will be on display in London this year as part of an exhibition exploring modernist art from Ukraine

TV

Frozen in time

The funerary sculptures depicting the armies of the emperor Qin Shi Huang (259–210 BC) are no less astonishing for their familiarity. At a site rediscovered in 1974 by farmers, the emperor was entombed surrounded not just by representations of his soldiers, but non-military figures such as court officials, acrobats and musicians. Access to the area is tightly controlled and the central tomb remains sealed – and perhaps never will be opened because of its fragility.

It therefore follows that any opportunity to get up close with the artefacts that have been revealed is to be welcomed. And that is exactly what a new Netflix documentary, from the team that made the excellent *Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb*, offers.

Mysteries of the Terracotta Warriors

Netflix / Streaming from Wednesday 12 June



A new documentary investigates the terracotta warriors, a form of funerary art found buried with the first emperor of China



Stephen Fry and Lena Dunham join forces as a father-daughter duo in the film *Treasure*

FILM

Don't look back

For self-evident reasons, many Holocaust dramas focus on the brutality of what happened. But there are other approaches, as new film *Treasure* shows by focusing on a father and daughter, Edek (Stephen Fry) and Ruth (Lena Dunham), who embark on a visit from the US to post-Communist Poland in 1991.

Edek is a Polish-born camp survivor, on the surface at least an optimist who doesn't want to talk about what he experienced. Ruth is a journalist, waspish and frustrated that her father, who continually sabotages her plans for their trip together, won't help her make sense of her family's past.

Based on Lily Brett's 1999 novel *Too Many Men*, and directed by Julia von Heinz, *Treasure* is a tragicomic study of how the traumas of the past play into the present.

Treasure

In cinemas / Friday 14 June

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES



LEFT TO RIGHT: Kate O'Flynn as Princess Mary, Dominic Cooper as Lord Seymour and Abbie Hern as Princess Bess in *My Lady Jane*

TV

Tudor fantasy

How might the life of Lady Jane Grey, the Nine Days' Queen, have played out had the teenager avoided the executioner's axe in 1554? And what if Henry VIII's son, Edward, hadn't died young?

These are the big questions that lie at the centre of a new counterfactual TV drama created by Gemma Burgess and based on a popular series of young adult fantasy adventure books by the writing trio Cynthia Hand, Brodi Ashton and Jodi Meadows.

In the show, which is packed with romance and intrigue, Jane (Emily Bader) is a headstrong and clever young woman who finds herself at the centre of manipulative attempts to crown her as queen. The twist is that it's down to Jane herself to save the day.

My Lady Jane

Prime / Streaming from Thursday 27 June

"We've come to see George Orwell as this prophet of dystopia, but that's only one side"



HELEN LEWIS tells us about her new radio series, co-hosted with Ian Hislop, on the 20th-century novelists Franz Kafka and George Orwell

They're both fascinating writers but why focus on George Orwell and Franz Kafka in particular?

This year marks 75 years since the publication of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the centenary of Kafka's death. The thing that connects them, of course, is the fact that both of them gave us adjectives. That's our way in: what does it mean to describe something as Orwellian or Kafkaesque?

We start with Ian Hislop talking to Alan Bates about whether his ordeal over the Horizon computer system failure [at the Post Office] was Orwellian or Kafkaesque. The case went through the courts in this labyrinthine, Kafkaesque way, but it was also Orwellian as some of the postmasters and postmistresses were threatened.

How true are these adjectives to how both would have seen their own work?

Orwell's legacy is shaped by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, [books about totalitarianism] that he wrote at the very end of his career. We've come to see him as this prophet of dystopia, but that's only one side. Orwell also wrote journalism and socially aware realist novels.

Kafka wanted all of his writings to be burned after his early death from tuberculosis, but his friend Max Brod published them instead. The other thing Brod did was shape the image of Kafka as a kind of nervous, nebbish guy. And that's partly true. But academics will often say that Kafka, particularly in the original German, was intended to be funny. He read out *The Trial* to his friends and they laughed. Our vision of him as this peddler of nightmares has to be leavened by the idea he had a sense of the absurd.

Did making the shows change your view of the writers?

We think of Orwell as a writer at the end of the British empire because he was posted

out in Burma when he was a policeman. But Kafka actually saw the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire. I think it's quite hard from an English perspective to remember how profound the upheavals were in central Europe between the First and Second World Wars, and he was writing in that context.

Apart from Alan Bates, who else do you interview?

One of the people I talked to was Anna Nolan, the runner-up on the first series of *Big Brother* in 2000. I asked: "Did you try and make friends with Big Brother in the diary room?" She said she did try and form a relationship – she was wheedling and pleading. That's what makes the series special to me, the insight into how much these writers foresaw human nature. **II**

Kafka vs Orwell begins on BBC Radio 4 on Saturday 8 June



Franz Kafka with his youngest sister, Ottilie, in Prague, where he lived for most of his life



Weekly TV & radio

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RECIPE

Victorian cucumber ice cream

ELEANOR BARNETT samples the delights of an unusual and refreshing version of one of the world's favourite summer treats

As the weather heats up, it's time to cool down with an ice cream. Our favourite summer treat originated from the sweet cool drinks known as 'sherberts' made since medieval times in the Middle East, which Italians froze into a dessert in the 17th century, the name Italianised to 'sorbetti'.

Before the advent of artificial refrigeration, ice or snow kept drinks cold, but these were costly and perishable materials. By the mid-16th century European scientists had worked out that adding saltpetre to the ice or snow lowered the temperature to below freezing, and a vessel of liquid could be frozen if placed in it. Antonio Latini, a steward who worked in some of the most elite Italian kitchens of the day, included recipes for strawberry, chocolate, aubergine and pine nut-flavoured sorbets in his 1692–94 cookery book. With the addition of sweetened dairy (along with candied

citron or squash), Latini's milk sorbet is recognised as the first true ice cream.

For this month's recipe we're going to skip ahead in time to the *Book of Ices* by Victorian celebrity chef Agnes Marshall. Like Latini, Marshall made ice cream in a whole host of surprising flavours that have long since gone out of fashion. Cucumber might seem an odd choice to our modern sensibilities, but the flavour is wonderfully refreshing and creamy. It's easy to see how, with the addition of a vibrant green food colouring and a dash of flavourful ginger brandy, Marshall got her nickname the 'Queen of Ices'.

Marshall was an excellent business woman who built a culinary empire. She sold elaborate ice cream moulds to go along with her recipes, including a cucumber shaped one, as well as Marshall-branded cooking ingredients like baking powder, gelatine and food colouring. In 1883 she opened her own cookery school in London, going on to lecture on the importance of food hygiene.

The recipe below would have been made in a wooden hand-cranked ice cream maker. Marshall sold her own patented version, which was shallow and wide so that the mixture in the bowl could freeze faster against the salt and ice that surrounded it. The inner bowl was turned using a handle, and the Victorian cook would then have set the churned mixture in an ice cave or box, a metal container within a wooden chest filled again with ice and salt. We can get the same effect today using an electric ice cream machine and the freezer.

Marshall's 'cucumber cream ice' would still make a delightful end to a summer's dinner party, and you could serve it in a cone without too much historical anachronism. Some in fact credit Marshall with being the first to pair ice cream and wafers, though the cone was still eaten with utensils until the early 20th century. **H**



Cucumber was one of the unexpected ice cream flavours championed by Victorian celebrity chef Agnes Marshall

Serves: 8–10

Difficulty: 3/10

Time taken: 1 hour (plus 3 hours of freezing time)

INGREDIENTS

1 large cucumber
280ml water
220g caster sugar
50ml ginger brandy
2 tsp green food colouring
2 lemons
570ml cream

METHOD

1. Peel the cucumber, remove any seeds, and slice into chunks.
2. Put the cucumber, water and half the sugar in a pan and cook for about 20 minutes or until softened.
3. Pound or blend the cucumber in the liquid until smooth then add the brandy, the food colouring and the juice of the lemons.
4. Run the mixture through a sieve.
5. Mix the cream and the rest of the sugar together. Stir the sweetened cream into the cucumber mixture.
6. Add to an ice-cream maker and churn according to the manufacturer's instructions.
7. Add it to a mould (if you're using one) or container, then set it for a few hours in the freezer.



Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her new book, *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo), is out now



An illustration featuring 'artificially served ices' from *The Encyclopaedia of Practical Cookery*, c1890

RADIO

Pressure point

Penalties in football constitute pure sporting theatre. Think, for instance of the 2022 World Cup final, when Argentina triumphed over France in a shootout after a thrilling game. The person we can thank for such moments of high drama is William McCrum (1865–1932), a wealthy Irish linen manufacturer and amateur goalkeeper.

It was McCrum – profiled for new radio documentary *On the Spot* by his great-grandson, the writer and former *Observer* literary editor Robert McCrum – who argued in 1890 for the introduction of the penalty to discourage professional fouls. As well as tracing his own family history, tied up with the settlement of Ulster by Scots and English, McCrum considers the psychology surrounding spot-kicks.

On the Spot

BBC Radio 4 / Sunday 30 June



Wolverhampton Wanderers' Johnny Hancocks scores from the penalty spot in a match against Middlesbrough in 1949

ELEANOR BARNETT/MARY EVANS/CHANNEL 5/GETTY IMAGES

Comedian Dara Ó Briain gets to grips with the mysteries of the Egyptian pyramids



TV

Build it high

With archaeologist Raksha Dave and Egyptologist Dr Chris Naunton on hand to provide expert insights, comedian Dara Ó Briain heads for Egypt. Here, in *The Mysteries of the Pyramids*, he asks the kinds of questions you might expect if you visited. How did the ancients move such huge chunks of stone? What was the function of these megastructures? And why did Egyptians stop building pyramids?

Ó Briain is always good company, so expect a few laughs. To quote the man himself when the show was announced, he will be getting "to live out all my Indiana Jones fantasies, scrambling in sandy tunnels in search of treasure, just without all the Nazis or the snakes".

The Mysteries of the Pyramids

My5 / streaming now

EXHIBITION

Out of the shadows

Few women have fascinated posterity more than the six wives of Henry VIII. Now, in its first exhibition of historical portraiture since reopening last summer after renovation, the National Portrait Gallery puts them centre stage, hoping to show who they were as individuals.

Six Lives: The Stories of Henry VIII's Queens will delve into how the six wives have been portrayed throughout history and popular culture, drawing on a wealth of media from well-known paintings by Hans Holbein the Younger to portrayals in modern cinema and contemporary photography by Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Plus there's a range of associated events to enjoy, including expert talks, curator introductions and a one-night-only performance by cast members of hit show *SIX the Musical*.

Six Lives: The Stories of Henry VIII's Queens

National Portrait Gallery, London /
20 June–8 September / npg.org.uk



A Catherine of Aragon costume from *SIX the Musical* will be on show in an exhibition about the life and legacy of the wives of Henry VIII



The history of video games, such as 2023's *A Highland Song* about teenage runaway Moira McKinnon, is explored at the National Museum of Scotland

EXHIBITION

Game mode

Step into the pixelated universe at the National Museum of Scotland's Game On exhibition, a vibrant journey through the history of gaming culture. This interactive extravaganza invites visitors to dive into 120 playable games spanning the last 50 years of recreational innovation.

Game On showcases iconic characters from Space Invaders to Mario, while tracing Scotland's legacy as a pioneer in game development. It explores the country's gaming roots, from ZX Spectrum's Dundee debut to the Edinburgh-based company Rockstar North's creation of one of the

bestselling video game franchises, *Grand Theft Auto*. Emerging talent like Sad Owl Studios, Bafta-winning creators of *Viewfinder*, and 4J Studios' role in the global phenomenon *Minecraft*, is also highlighted.

Examining everything from the evolution of arcade machines and handheld consoles to the relationship between gaming, music and film, the exhibition highlights the industry's importance to modern society and culture.

Game On

National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh /
29 June–3 November / nms.ac.uk

TV

Saving the day

In 1994, just weeks before the Women's Rugby World Cup was due to begin in the Netherlands, the event was abruptly cancelled. So unhappy were the Scottish team that, after a meeting in an Edinburgh pub, they decided to organise their own international championship, an event today recognised as an 'official' World Cup.

This is just one of the tales featured in new episodes of the excellent Scottish oral history series, *Our Story*. Presented by Mark Stephen, the show also promises first-hand takes on how a Cold War early warning station was transformed into an artists' community, Balnakeil Craft Village, and recollections of the 1984 miners' strike. **11**

Our Story

BBC Radio Scotland and BBC Sounds / Summer



Victorious England players Karen Almond and Janice Ross celebrate winning the 1994 Women's Rugby Union World Cup



HI
PODCAST

WORLD WAR TWO'S GREATEST BATTLES

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Ellie Cawthorne and Rachel Dinning are joined by James Holland, military historian, author and founder of Chalke History Festival, to explore these moments that mattered.

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Tokyo in five places

From fishing village to imperial capital, Japan's biggest city has been repeatedly reimagined. **CHRISTOPHER HARDING** picks his must-visit sights

1 Meiji-jingu Paean to the new capital

For two and a half centuries from 1603, the city then known as Edo was the power base of the ruling Tokugawa shogun (military dictator) who effectively ruled Japan. But it was with the so-called Meiji Restoration of 1868 – and the resumption of direct imperial rule – that the seeds of modern Tokyo were sown. The Shinto Meiji-jingu (Meiji Shrine), completed in 1920, was built with Japanese cypress and copper in traditional *nagare-zukuri* style to honour the Meiji emperor who was the figurehead of that watershed moment.

The shrine was destroyed in the Second World War and subsequently rebuilt, and now comprises a beautiful compound; the Inner Garden contains the shrine of the emperor, who died in 1912, and his empress Shoken's iris garden. Tokyo can feel quite overwhelming at first, just because of the sheer urban mass and intensity, so the Meiji Shrine, which sits in a serene forest, provides space for quiet reflection, as well as insights into the city's Shinto heritage.



Kannushi priests proceed to a purifying ceremony at the Haraesha pavilion at Meiji-jingu



The Hozomon gate leads to Tokyo's oldest Buddhist temple, Senso-ji, built in the seventh century

2 Senso-ji First temple

Vast swathes of central Tokyo were incinerated by US firebombing raids in March 1945, obliterating a host of historic sites along with enormous numbers of other buildings. An estimated 100,000 people lost their lives, and 10 times that number lost their homes. Many were subsequently rebuilt, though, and one essential monument to visit – a testament to Japan's mixed religious and philosophical traditions – is the temple Senso-ji, also known as Asakusa Kannon Temple.

It's the city's oldest Buddhist temple, first built in the seventh century to house a tiny golden image of Kannon, goddess of mercy, reputedly caught in fishermen's nets. Enter through the massive Kami-nari-mon (Thunder Gate), guarded by fierce-looking deities and with a huge red lantern hanging in the centre. Incense swirls around the central hall, and it's surrounded by little shops, stalls and traditional restaurants; there are also Shinto shrines in the temple grounds, as is common in many Buddhist temples. It's a lovely, bustling place that gives a palpable sense of Tokyo's Buddhist heritage.

3 Edo-Tokyo Museum Everything everywhere all at once

Because the city has been ravaged by such destruction, particularly in the 20th century, it can be hard to picture what it might have felt like to explore in its heyday under the Tokugawa shogunate. In the mid-18th century, Edo had a population of more than 1 million and was likely the largest metropolis in the world, with a commensurately rich cultural life.

Across seven floors, Edo-Tokyo Museum contains recreations of homes, streets, shops, costumes and so on from that era, allowing you to immerse yourself in the city of that fascinating period. The permanent exhibition, which also examines later Tokyo, is currently closed for major renovations, and due to reopen in 2025. In the meantime, virtual tours, a mobile app and the incredible digital archive offer ways to explore.





GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/DEAMTIME

4 Ueno Park Mental exercise

Another oasis in central Tokyo is one of Japan's first western-style parks, built not long after the Meiji Restoration (really a civil war) of 1868. Today it's famed as the place in the capital to indulge in a spot of *hanami* – admiring the *sakura* blossoms of the 1,200 or so cherry trees that bloom here each spring. But it was originally designed for the improvement of Tokyo's citizens, so, along with all that beautiful greenery and foliage, it also contains a zoo and a raft of museums.

Equally inviting are the remains of the once-sprawling Kan'ei-ji temple, founded in 1625 and largely destroyed by fire later that century and then further damaged during fighting in 1868. Surviving remnants include the Toshogu shrine dedicated to Tokugawa Iyasu, founder of the Tokugawa shogunate.



Ueno Park is one of Tokyo's best spots to see cherry blossom in the spring, thanks to its hundreds of trees



The permanent collection of the Edo-Tokyo Museum offers a window onto daily life in the old city of Edo

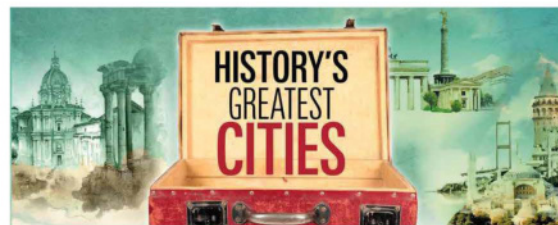


5 Golden Gai Grit among the glitz

For those who feel that Tokyo today is perhaps a little bit too shiny and smooth in places, there's one tiny sliver of Shinjuku that retains a more raw, grittier atmosphere. Within this densely populated ward of Tokyo, which is a major transport hub, survives a tightly packed cluster of six narrow alleys that together are known as Golden Gai. It's a warren crammed with at least 200 tiny spots for eating and drinking, some able to hold no more than a dozen people, which in the postwar years gained a reputation for prostitution and black-market trading.

Over the next couple of decades, those clients were joined and then replaced by writers, artists and intellectuals, and – having resisted pressure from developers – it still has an artsy, unruly atmosphere, a place where old wood and neon sit side by side. Aromas of cooking meat waft through the lanes, varying according to the speciality of the venue – each has its own personality. It's a great place to hang out for an evening and get away from the hyper-modern and polished face of the city. **H**

Christopher Harding is a broadcaster, author and senior lecturer in Asian history at the University of Edinburgh. His books include *The Japanese: A History in Twenty Lives* (Penguin, 2022), and he writes on Substack at illuminasia.org. He was speaking to travel writer **Paul Bloomfield**, the host of our podcast series, *History's Greatest Cities*



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PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

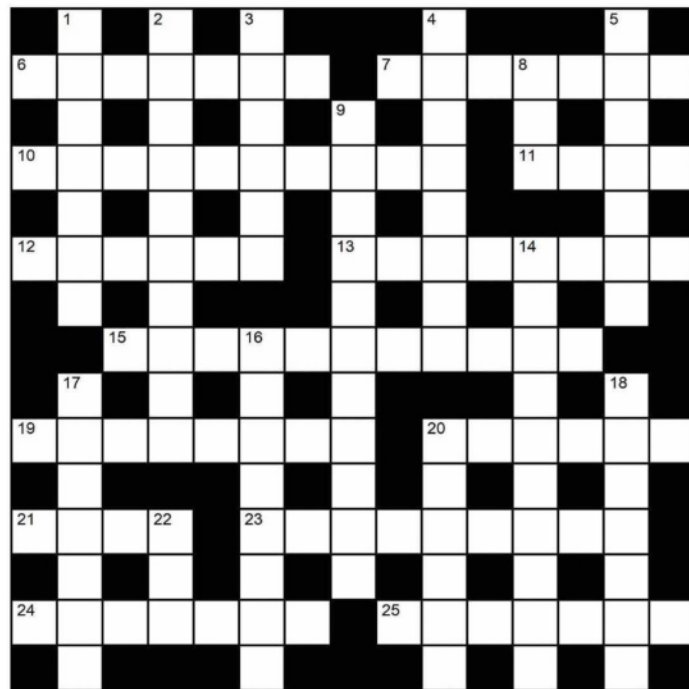
- 6** Ancient Greek mathematician and astronomer who remained a dominant influence in science until the 16th century (7)
7 US political slang for an independent voter, derived from the word for 'big chief' in the Algonquin language (7)
10 Female ruler of Egypt who died c1458 BC, having attained the full titles and power of a pharaoh (10)
11 Artist who painted *The Third of May 1808*, a revolutionary work commemorating Spanish resistance to Napoleon's forces (4)
12 Sir Thomas ___, lord mayor of London who served during a severe outbreak of plague in the early 1580s (6)
13 Henry ___, 19th-century politician known for designing a type of horse carriage (8)
15 Eldest daughter of Alfred the Great and ruler of the Kingdom of Mercia in the early 10th century (11)
19 Nickname of US gangster Al Capone (8)
20 Roman emperor feted for his conquest of Dacia (6)
21 Treatment centres, named after a Belgian town whose hot springs have been used for bathing since Roman times (4)
23 The Slavery ___ Act (1833) was passed just days before the death of possibly its most famous supporter (9)
24 Native American people of the plains of Wyoming and Colorado, and allies of the Cheyenne (7)
25 Commander in chief of the New Model Army during the Civil Wars (7)

Down

- 1** London landmark last rebuilt in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, famous for surviving the Blitz (2,5)
2 British historian and prolific author, known for her *Six Tudor Queens* series (6,4)
3 19th-century French physicist after whom a unit of electric current is named (6)
4 Name applied to an area of the Great Plains, stricken by drought in the 1930s (4,4)
5 The Arab dynasty that ruled the empire of the Caliphate from AD 661–750 (7)
8 The use of such headwear by France's Louis XIV and England's Charles II encouraged its popularity at their courts (3)



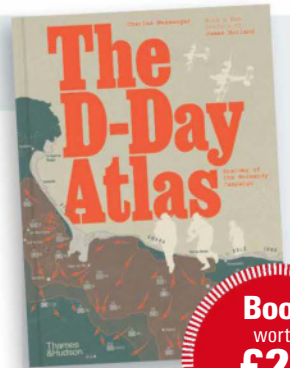
Which female pharaoh ruled Egypt until her death in c1458 BC? (10 across)



The Third of May 1808 was painted by which celebrated Spanish artist? (11 across)

- 9** First lady and vice-president of Argentina, who later became president following the death of her husband in 1974 (6,5)
14 Elite soldiers originally chosen for their explosives-throwing ability (10)
16 Native American chieftain credited with uniting the Iroquois (8)
17 Crown jewels item: its last major alteration, in 1910, was the addition of the largest part of the Cullinan Diamond (7)
18 Surrey town whose castle was the residence of the bishop of Winchester from the 12th century until 1927 (7)
20 The island refuge of the Nationalist government after the communist takeover of mainland China in 1949 (6)
22 British political party founded by the so-called 'Gang of Four' in 1981 (3)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Book worth **£25** for 5 winners

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Get a new perspective on the Allied invasion of Normandy with Charles Messenger's comprehensive new study, featuring dozens of full-colour maps, photographs and reconstruction drawings. The book also explores the German experience of D-Day, as well as the activities of the Resistance in northern and western France.

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- Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, July 2024 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **July2024@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on 3 July 2024.
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Solution to our May 2024 crossword

- Across** 1 Matamba 5 Rajput 10 Trail 11 Suez Canal 12 Lee 13 Tamil 14 Ether 15 Arras 17 Ancestry 18/7 Emmeline Pankhurst 20 Botha 22 Split 23 Nubia 25 BEA 26 Union flag 27 Livia 28 Hesse 29 Essenes
Down 1 Matilda 2 Thane 3 Miletus 4 Aksum 6 Archers 8 Tyler 9 Jellicoe 16 Ramillies 17 Asian flu 19 Entente 20 Beatles 21 Arawaks 22 South 24 Bagne 25 Bevan

Four winners of Griffinology:

Chris Skinner, Ipswich; John Wilkins, Wolverhampton; Gary Siddle, Durham; Suzan Allen, London

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Crusader criminals

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Catherine Fletcher takes a trip along the highways that once connected the mighty ancient empire



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Clare Mulley profiles a remarkable woman who repeatedly resisted the Nazis in occupied Poland



The first Paris Olympics

David Goldblatt charts the extraordinary story of the 1900 games

Legend of the Bruce

Fiona Watson seeks out the true character of the iconic Scottish king



MY HISTORY HERO

Speaker of the House of Commons Sir Lindsay Hoyle chooses

William Lenthall

1591–1662



Sir Lindsay Hoyle has been speaker of the House of Commons since 2019, and the MP for Chorley since 1997. Before his election as speaker, he was a Labour Party politician



An undated painting of William Lenthall, on display in London's National Portrait Gallery. "He was a man of great strength of character," says Sir Lindsay Hoyle

IN PROFILE

William Lenthall served as speaker of the House of Commons for nearly 20 years, both before and after the execution of Charles I. The lawyer-turned-politician is best known for the defiance he showed on 4 January 1642, when the king tried to seize five MPs whom he accused of treason. Lenthall's refusal to reveal their whereabouts was an assertion of the rights of the Commons in the face of royal tyranny. He died in Burford, Oxfordshire.

// The respect that sovereign and speaker now show each other is down to William Lenthall's stand all those years ago //

When did you first hear about William Lenthall?

At school, though it's only since becoming speaker – just like William Lenthall – that I've fully come to appreciate his significance as a historical figure.

What kind of man was he?

Firstly, he was a man of great strength of character. Secondly, he was a family man, and every time I walk up the stairs to the speaker's chambers and see the magnificent painting of Speaker Lenthall and his family in all their finery – believed to have been painted by the portraitist Edward Bower – I'm reminded of that fact.

What was his finest hour? Well, it's got to be the moment that he stood up to Charles I in 1642 after the king, accompanied by around 400 loyal troops, attempted to seize five MPs who he thought guilty of treason. When Charles asked Speaker Lenthall where they were, he famously replied: "May it please your majesty, I have neither eyes to see, nor tongue to speak, in this place, but as the house is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here."

It was a defining moment in English history because it was the first time that a speaker had declared his first loyalty to the liberty of Parliament rather than the will of the monarch. Crucially, it also changed the relationship between Parliament and monarch for good: the king or queen has never again been allowed to enter the Commons chamber – and the respect that sovereign and speaker now show each other is down to his stand all those years ago.

Even now, after more than three years in the role, I sometimes ask myself: "How would Speaker Lenthall have handled this?" And that gives me the courage to do the right thing.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about him?

Every speaker has had his or her detractors – the role inevitably involves ruffling feathers from time to time. But nothing I've learned about Lenthall has lessened my respect for him.

Can you see any parallels between Lenthall's life and your own?

Like Speaker Lenthall, I maintain order in the chamber and am always strictly impartial. Thankfully, however, speakers no longer run the risk of ending up being beheaded if they incur the sovereign's displeasure! Incidentally, I should add that I get on very well with today's King Charles.

What would you ask Lenthall if you could meet him?

I'd love to know what gave him the strength to stand up to Charles I – was it his anger at the king's behaviour, or merely his desire to try and do the right thing? **H**

Sir Lindsay Hoyle was talking to York Membery



Guests discuss inspirational figures in the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs8





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